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**THE BOOK OF**  
**FAIR WOMEN**





# THE BOOK OF FAIR WOMEN

## PART I

REMEMBERING, O noble and generous Lord, the fair courtesy and sweet welcome you have ever been wont to extend to all who approach you, more especially those who seek not to contain their admiration for your many and varied excellencies, and are bound to you, even as I am, by ties of the strongest gratitude for the benefits you continually bestow, a desire has grown up within me, these many months, to make some return, however humble, for the favours you have heaped upon me with lavish hand; and being

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unable to effect this privily I am constrained to make known to you my project in the following manner. Being aware, that almost from your cradle, your chiefest delight has been in the contemplation of feminine graces, a preoccupation truly worthy of the exquisite refinement of your mind, I have at length decided me to conjure up before you a peerless Dame, such as your eyes have never yet beheld, depicted in all the glory of her matchless beauty by the five pencils of five most noble and learned gentlemen, your devoted servants, who would risk their lives in the performance of your lightest wish. Well do I know, my master, the willingness with which you would pour out your gold for the sight of a portrait, wondrous as that which made the world ring with the praise of Zeuxis, the painter, when he

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rendered immortal the charms of the lovely Helen. But I would not have your gold for two reasons. First because this Lady, if her charms were purchasable, might be called, as was Helen, a woman of light reputation, whereat I should grieve very heartily. And second because the desire of my heart would then remain unsatisfied, and your infinite kindness to me unrepaid. So say nothing of money, and let me now endeavour to diminish my load of obligation towards you.

✕ I must tell you by way of introduction to this Lady of matchless charm, that some months since, being newly come from your villa, where in company with you and divers other gentlemen I had passed fifteen days in agreeable diversions, at night in bed, being asleep, I saw gathered round your hearth Signor

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Giacomo Codroipo, the worthy descendant of a great line of forefathers whose virtues, like your own, do but add lustre one to the other ; his brother-in-law, M. Pietro Arigone, a most noble gentleman, skilled in every accomplishment that pleases and delights ; the excellent Doctor della Fornace, the soul of kindness, courtesy and gentleness, whose presence is ever eagerly sought for, and two other illustrious and distinguished gentlemen : Signor Vinciguerra, who esteems you above all men, and Signor Ladislao, who regards me in such friendly fashion that he is ever desirous of falling in with my wishes.

✕ We were thus gathered together, you, my Lord, and I being also present, and discoursing most pleasantly on divers matters, when Signor Giacomo interrupted our

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talk with the words : " Fair sirs, if it so please you, let us defer our argument for the present, and I will carry you with me to my house at San Martino, with which some among you are already acquaint. There I propose to pass three days in hawking and to make known to you a falcon of such unrivalled prowess that beside it Federigo degli Alberighi's would seem but a barndon fowl. The days we will devote to chasing the heron and the wild duck, and the nights thereof to sweet discourse on such matters as may best entertain and divert you. I pray you therefore, gentlemen, to bear me company, and to bring with you hearts rightly attuned to gaiety." Great was the pleasure which these words of your kinsman excited, and whereas none had hitherto been conscious of any desire to leave the delights of town

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for a journey into the country, all were now filled with an eager impatience to begone and to find themselves met together again at San Martino. You, my Lord, alone excused yourself, alleging a multitude of engagements, and bewailing the adverse fate which prevented you from sharing a pleasure that would now be rendered incomplete by your absence. Finally, however, seeing that naught could persuade you, and that you were in truth prevented from joining the company, the remainder of us agreed to set forth, and taking our leave of you proceeded to the house of Signor Giacomo. There finding everything in readiness (the serving-men having early received their instructions) we quickly got to horse, some wrapped in the skins of the wild boar and others in those of the wolf and the fox,

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for the season being midwinter the cold was very severe. Carrying with us all we needed for the chase, we spurred forward our horses and arrived at our destination before nightfall. Whereupon dismounting we hastened towards the glowing hearth of one of the apartments in that palace so frequently praised by you and which in my eyes has no rival in this world, and there warmed ourselves. Supping thereafter with all imaginable cheerfulness we next began to grow weary, and desiring to arise betimes next morning we gaily addressed ourselves to repose, singing, some madrigals, others ballads, and others again sonnets, each of us extolling the Lady whom he chiefly delighted to honour. But mark this, my Lord, that each of us in his song commended his mistress as the fairest of women, from which



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thing there arose a strife among us, and not being able to come to any agreement on the matter, it was at length determined in the following manner that I should act as judge. Signor Pietro Arigone, having seen that our contentions waxed ever louder and hotter, interposed with these words: "It doth appear to me, honoured sirs and good friends, that having before us three nights to be spent in pleasant and cheerful converse, as saith my esteemed and worthy brother-in-law when he invited us hither, we cannot do better than create for ourselves a Lady, whose like, mayhap, we have not yet beheld, *i.e.* of beauty undeniably perfect, a thing in good sooth which, though we can but picture it, may worthily absorb our conversation, and whoever is found in the end to have added the most to the charms of this peerless though

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imaginary fair one, his Lady shall be accounted the fairest among those whom each of us in his song has proclaimed the most beautiful." As these words ended, the Doctor rising hastily said : " A mighty fine idea truly is this of Signor Pietro's, but I scarce see how it will put an end to our strivings, for without a judge to determine which of us has added most largely to the charms of the Peerless One from those of his own Lady, I see no happy conclusion, and indeed methinks we might strive together for a hundred thousand years. For is it not easy to see, and I on my part would not yield half-an-ell, you would each declare (there being none to decide between us) that his goddess had bestowed upon our Lady a larger share of her beauties than had the mistress of my heart? It would therefore be well to elect among

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ourselves one who should rule in the matter and judge rather than argue." Having thus spoken the excellent Doctor was silent. Whereupon I (thanks to the courtesy of the company) was elected judge, not, however, without exacting the condition, that, as I could not now celebrate myself the charms of my new mistress, the Signora Lucrezia Toronda, using her incomparable beauty in the creation of a Lady of perfect loveliness, another should exercise that privilege on my behalf. Whilst therefore I was gazing intently into the face of each one present, seeking to assure myself who would most zealously uphold the right of my divine Lucrezia, marvel of nature and pride of our time, to be acclaimed the first in loveliness and closest in resemblance to the Peerless One, Signor Vinciguerra and Signor Ladislao

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betook themselves somewhat apart from the rest of the company, returning a little while thereafter with smiling countenances. Seeing which Signor Giacomo said in a loud voice so that all might hear : “ I perceive that these gentlemen make merry at my expense, feeling assured of victory. But patience—we shall see.” At this speech few of us could forbear laughing outright, for it was a matter of common knowledge that they loved and admired two ladies of inconsiderable beauty, more akin indeed to the ugliness of Gabrina than to the fair looks of Angelica. The laugh thus being turned, Signor Giacomo demanded : “ If you do not hope for victory, strive you then for others ; who may they be ? ” “ My Lord and Luigino,” they answered. At this unexpected reply I could not re-

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frain from saluting them, and warmly thanking them a thousand times on your behalf and my own. Signor Vinciguerra therefore took up the matter for you and Signor Ladislao for me. Quieted now for a brief space, I scarce know who it was stirred up strife again among us saying it seemed to him ill justice that your fair mistress should strive with ours for the crown of beauty, seeing you were not with us (here arose a clamour) even in spirit. But none would hear him and opportunity was still yours to obtain for your illustrious mistress, the Signora Ottavia Picezza, glorious in love, through the fine speeches of her advocate, the chiefest place and favour. Being now at last in agreement we abandoned ourselves to the influence of sweet and serene repose, having first made solemn

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promise that the early dawn should find each of us ready, hawk in hand, and, after passing the day in the pleasures of the chase, we would gather again round the fire-side, and begin, in all good fortune, upon the creation of our Lady.

✕ But the dawn was already past and the sun nearing our hemisphere when we left the soft sloth of our couches and addressed ourselves to the chase. On the day's doings I shall not dwell, being warned therefrom by the intention which made me take pen in hand. But be assured that all the exertions of hawking afforded us great sport and diversion, and as the sun sank into the sea we wended our way homewards, burdened with heavy spoil. The falcons and horses safely bestowed, we supped with all despatch, and having eaten our fill, drew near the fire, seating our-

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selves at ease on the chairs drawn forward by the serving-men. After a few words had passed between us on the subject of the day's sport the Signor Doctor rose to his feet and said: "Seeing, gentle sirs, that the day has been spent in the pleasant fashion agreed upon and the night has returned, let us no longer neglect our Fair Lady, but taking brushes and palette in hand, devote, if not the whole, at least a fair portion of the night to the matter of her portrayal." At this speech of the Signor Doctor's a murmur of applause was heard around, signifying the hearty desire of the whole party to fall in with his suggestion. To this end, silence was commanded, and I was placed somewhat apart, the better to hear what was said, and in the end to deliver judgment as to whose Lady was possessed of the chief beauties

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of the Peerless One. The Signor Doctor, by the manifest desire of all, now rose again to his feet, and with pleasant laughter broke the silence, saying: "Since, fair sirs, it is your good pleasure to confer upon me the honour of beginning the portrait of our Lady, I will not shrink from the task, nor cause any division amongst this honourable company, but get me to work without more ado. Truly I might have discoursed with greater ease and convenience upon such matters as Bartolo, Baldo, Ulpiano, Paolo, Papiniano, and other great lawyers have written about. Nevertheless, finding myself in this joyous company, surrounded by all that may please and delight, I do perceive that the argument we have chosen, though these learned doctors dealt not with it, is in no wise displeasing nor un-



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becoming to me, be I doctor or no. Our intent therefore being to create a Lady without flaw or blemish, methinks we cannot do better than follow the example of the painter, of whom mention has already been made, who being in Croton, or it may be Agrigentum, and desiring to paint a picture perfect in every part to be placed in the Temple of Juno, chose from among the Crotonian or maybe Agrigentine maidens who stood bared before him, five damsels of surpassing fairness, and taking this part from one and that from another and wondrously adapting them to his subject, he did use them all to depict a flawless and exquisite beauty. God grant we may carry through our emprise to the same fortunate and felicitous conclusion, and with Heaven's blessing on it I have no fear nor doubt when I be-





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think me of her who so greatly delights me, a fair, noble, chaste and gentle lady, and in me grows the hope ever greater and more ardent that above all the others I shall be able to exalt and extol her." Pausing here for a brief space, the excellent Doctor added : " With two kinds of beauty may a woman be endowed : one of the character the other of the body. You know well what constitutes the beauty of the character, and the beauty of the body is likewise apparent. We will imitate Art, the mirror of Nature, which in the beginning applies itself to that which is simplest and plainest, passing on by imperceptible degrees to the more complex and elaborate. To my mind it is far easier to picture the beauty of the body than the beauty of the soul, and therefore, with your goodwill, I will begin

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our joyous task by discoursing of the charms that adorn our Lady's person, leaving those of her character, no small part of the perfection with which we do strive to invest her, to be dealt with afterwards." None dissenting from this the Signor Doctor forthwith proceeded: "Beginning therefore with the outward charms of our Lady: many and divers are the opinions as to which is the chiefest of feminine beauties, but, caring naught for precedents, I desire to take first her hair, for that, methinks, is of more importance to her beauty than any other of her charms, seeing that without it she would be even as a garden without flowers, or a ring without jewels, as a forest wherein the trees have been felled, or a river that has no flow; nay, she would be comparable only to a night

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when the stars are hid, or a day when the sun shines not and all nature seems dead. Truly their hair is the glory of women ; proudly under its weight they go, and ceaselessly they tend it, marking not the hours in their flight, nor seeming ever to grow weary. To gauge rightly the power of its beauty, bethink you of some unfortunate bereft of her tresses ; be she beautiful as the angels she cannot hope to please. Were she fair even as the goddess Aphrodite, fresh from the courts of heaven, rising lightly from the sea's green depths on the crest of a wave, with Graces and rosy Cupids around her, encompassed by the magic girdle of Love, exhaling the perfumes of the Orient and scattering showers of balm, yet without hair, wander she where she will, even her Vulcan she will

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fail to charm. Tresses, therefore, must adorn our Lady, and in colour they shall be like unto clear shining gold, for that in truth affords more delight to the eye than any other whatsoever. Thus you continually meet with 'shining locks,' 'golden hair' and like phrases in the various works of our writers: Petrarch in his sonnets, 'Whence gathers Love the gold,' 'If my life,' 'Love and I so full of wonder,' and 'The breeze which the green laurel,' in his canzonetta, 'Though that which drew me,' in his sestinas 'Youthful Lady,' 'Garments green' and 'Waters clear and fresh and sweet,' and in a thousand other places clearly shows by his continual picturing of Laura and her golden locks, that fair, and fair only, are the tresses he adores. Bembo holds the same opinion, as is shown

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in his sonnets, 'Rippling locks of golden hair.' 'From those fair tresses,' 'Oh, proud and cruel' and elsewhere; and were it not that I fear to weary you, gentle sirs, I would quote you besides from Ariosto, Sannazzaro and others of our greatest, and seeing among them so great agreement on the matter you would be fain to confess that as I have depicted them our Lady's tresses must be. Some truly are not averse to the colour of amber rather than gold. Indeed Petrarch somewhat inclines thereto in his sonnet, 'Heavenly breeze,' wherein he affirms that amber loses its bravery when compared with the fair head of Laura. Bembo likewise has a word on the subject in one of the above-quoted sonnets. Moreover we read that Nero likened the locks of his Poppæa to amber, which in colour resembles pure



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transparent gold faintly mingled and blended with silver. But because less belauded and sung are tresses of amber I have chosen locks like in colour to the purest and most precious of metals to adorn the head of our Lady. Furthermore in soft curls shall they fall, such as Petrarch and Bembo have described in their above-quoted poems and Ariosto likewise elsewhere. Finally they shall be long, for even as short hair best becomes a man so do lengthy tresses lend greater grace to a woman. These three qualities in our Lady's locks are all to be found in those of Alcina as described by Ariosto. Now mentioning but briefly the fact that our Lady's hair should also be heavy and thick, for as with its weight and thickness its beauty increases so with its scantiness does it diminish, we come to the point of considering whether or

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no her golden locks should hang loose and flowing freely adown her back, tossed carelessly now over one shoulder and now over the other. Such were the locks of Venus, as Virgil relates, when she went forth unawares to meet her pious son Æneas, but elsewhere, when praising Camilla, and again when describing Dido, he speaks of their hair as confined. Wherefore it would appear that either fashion may worthily become a Lady. In the time of Petrarch, when the Church had her seat at Avignon, it was customary in that part of France which gave birth to his adored Laura, for maidens to wear their tresses loose, whilst those who were matrons confined theirs with bands of pearls, or jewels, or whatever best suited their station. Wherefore 'tis not without reason that some wiseacre has deduced from the sonnet, 'Gentle

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breeze,' that Laura had been given in marriage, since the poet therein describes her locks as confined, whereas when he became enamoured of her, which according to some was on the second day of the tenth month of the twelfth year of her age, it hung loose and flowing. Into the truth of this statement others more curious may inquire, while I, returning to our Lady, would recall how Ovid pictured Atalanta, the daughter of Schoenus, in her swift chase of the fierce wild boar, with her tresses simply caught up in a knot. But no more of this ; let the conclusion be that our Lady's hair shall be long, thick, golden and softly curling, flowing down her back in fair loose tresses, not hidden away in any net of gold or silk, but open to the gaze, so that each favoured mortal may behold it without breathing an inward malediction

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on that which half hides it from his view."

✕ At this point the excellent Doctor ceased his discourse, whereupon Signor Pietro said: "Ah, Signor Doctor, if it be your good pleasure, declare to us the name of the being whose most fair tresses have inspired you to such eloquence in the adornment of the Lady we are now at pains to create from realities rather than imaginations." To this demand the Signor Doctor, half in fear of otherwise appearing discourteous and obdurate and half in eagerness to make known that it was in no mean and vile habitation that his heart had made its Holy of Holies, cheerfully made answer: "'Tis your sister, signor, the noblest and purest of maidens, Signora Ortensia Arigone, whose most fair and shining locks I perceived with my mind (being unable to view

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them with these eyes), which inspired me in describing those where-with our Lady must be adorned if when complete in every part she is to appear a perfect marvel of beauty." At this all the company smiled, and Signor Pietro pleasantly laughing replied : " You, therefore, it doth plainly appear, are the lover of my sister, though how it comes about that she be more extolled by you than any other I know not ; but such pleasure has your free confession in the hearing of these gentlemen afforded me, that I swear to you to so prevail upon her, that to you she shall never be cruel, hard nor unkind, but in so far as a gentlewoman may who holds her honour dearer than aught else besides, she shall show herself gracious and unbending in your presence." " Oh, happy am I," cried the excellent Doctor, overcome with joy ;

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and, rendering a thousand thanks to Signor Pietro, desired to share with him the honour of having bestowed upon our Lady, by means of his sister, the chiefest of her charms. But the three others set their faces against this, and one after the other gently endeavoured to make clear that if the conditions upon which the Peerless One had been granted this adornment were more carefully considered, it would be seen that to her, and her only, whose charms had inspired him must the honour be given. "Has not my Lady," said Signor Vinciguerra, maintaining the claims of your mistress, the honourable Signora Ottavia Picezza, "all the charms you have mentioned and more? I can scarce believe that the glory of Aphrodite's tresses, which is said to surpass that of amber, gold and even the sun, can match hers in radiance, nor that the

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locks of Apollo, fair though they be, can vie with those that shine like the clearest mirror exposed to the midday glare." Then spoke Signor Giacomo: "I trow that never nymph nor Grace, at that sweet season of the year when together lightly dancing and jesting they wander through the green and blossoming country, unloosed to the soft zephyrs tresses more exquisite, more beauteous and more alluring than those of my Lady." "And I," said Signor Ladislao, "what can I say in praise of mine?" "Or rather of mine," interposed I, and then fell silent, while he continued: "You have each maintained that our mistress's hair surpasses all other in the wonder of its beauty, but your eyes are blinded by love, while I, who love not the Lady whom here I honour and defend, have far clearer vision, and indeed cannot conceive

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myself exercising a wrong judgment in the matter. The Signor Judge is her lover, and therefore I cannot, as I said, err through love, which in your case I do perceive has extinguished right judgment. I now declare that the Signora Lucrezia Toronda, in whom honour and purity dwell, was endowed by nature at her birth with hair like unto that which, thousands upon thousands of years since, rendered beautiful Absalom, fairest of men, and which in truth is of so marvellous a quality that the heavens above, enamoured of its loveliness, stooped down and granted it a place in those realms where Berenice's once reigned." Signor Ladislao would have spoken further to content my desire, but was not permitted, since with the discretion that characterises him, Signor Pietro desired that we should now pass on



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to the other charms of our Lady, spending no more time on her tresses.

✕ The discourse on our Lady's hair being now at an end, and the company evidently expecting the excellent Doctor to speak further on the matter of her charms, he rose to his feet, saying : " It would not become me, fair sirs, to discourse again so early in the evening upon the perfections of our Lady ; suffice it that your courtesy has permitted me to speak before others in her praise." Then said Signor Giacomo : " Truly you are but a poor courser, excellent Doctor, that thus early in the race you begin to grow weary ; indeed, to speak frankly, you seem in a similar plight to that of a horse my schoolmaster once told me of, belonging to one Sulpicius Galba, which being on the point of starting on a great journey, and

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about to issue forth from the gateway, fell down beneath his master, and lay prone upon the ground, seemingly overcome by such exhaustion, as if he had already made journey from the Tanis to the Nile."

"A right fine comparison is this of yours, had you but made it at the beginning instead of in the midst of our discoursings," made answer the Signor Doctor, "but methinks I do feel as if, while rejoicing in blue skies, I had been roundly bespattered with hail." Signor Doctor," rejoined Signor Giacomo, "you have subtly contrived to render my words unkind, but I would ask you to believe that I did speak them in good faith, and without thought of malice." "Now indeed," cried the excellent Doctor, "you do accuse me of the malice from which you so anxiously clear yourself." Whereat all burst out

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a-laughing. When we were somewhat quieted we did prevail upon Signor Vinciguera to take upon himself the charge of resuming the discourse, and when he could obtain a hearing he began in these words : “ It would have pleased me better, and doubtless brought fairer fortune to our Lady, if the excellent Doctor or some other among you, more learned in such matters than myself, for I cannot pretend to the age, knowledge nor authority of any here present, had risen to the occasion and proceeded to bestow upon our Lady one or other of the charms in which she is yet lacking. But as it is your pleasure that mine shall be the voice now to be raised in her honour, I will go forward with the matter, and if I fail to satisfy you I will submit with all patience to the untimely curtailment of my discoursings.” The company

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having assured him of their confidence and esteem, he modestly assumed the position the good Doctor had left vacant and took up his speech again, saying: "With her tresses only is our Lady yet adorned, my part shall it be to speak of her eyes and brow. Not unknown is it to your worships that although fair tresses do ensnare many hearts as Ariosto, in the 'Lament of Isabella,' and again when describing the beauties of Olympia, Petrarch in his sonnet 'Heavenly breeze,' Bembo in 'Are these those beauteous eyes,' and 'From those fair locks,' and yet again Petrarch in his song 'When she, the faithful comforter,' have shown and made clear, nevertheless, in my opinion, the eyes of a Lady do more attract and allure a man to love, and to become the slave of love, than any other of her charms whatsoever, rare and

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exquisite though they may be. Indeed, Petrarch in his early sonnets has confessed that it was the charm in Laura's lovely eyes that drew him until he became entangled in the net of love ; Propertius averred the like ; and, tell me, I pray you, of your courtesy, when Cimon gazed into the heavenly orbs of fair Iphigenia, did he not lose all consciousness of aught else ? Ask Circe, daughter of the Sun, in what manner she was moved when she beheld the light in the eyes of King Picus. Ask that enamoured matron, in the 'Golden Ass' of Apuleius, what she wot of in the eyes of her son-in-law, and you will see that in the eyes does Love more often lie hid than in any other part whatsoever. The eyes, as the seat of the noblest of the senses, has it pleased Mother Nature to place above and crowning all others. In

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the eyes only, some say, can life be distinguished from death. To be bereft of the eyes is a fate more cruel than the cruellest death. I cannot forbear to marvel at those who lived on when their sight was extinguished. Never can I read of Tiresias, of Antipater, of Didymus, of Homer, of Diodotus the Stoic, of Caius Drusus, of Appius Claudius, of Samson, of Æsculapius, of Lippo, of Hannibal, of Tobias, and lastly, of John King of Bohemia, who lived in the days of Petrarch, without feeling the acutest pity. Some with false sophistries do maintain that their deprivation was a blessing in disguise, but clearly do I perceive that it was their extremest ill fortune. Diverse, indeed, from such resignation was the act of Stesichorus, who, having learned that the light of his eyes had been darkened for that he had spoken

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ill of Helen, the fair one, did all in his power to retrieve her good graces, and whereas he had formerly miscalled, now could not too highly commend her, in the hope that his lost treasure might thus be restored to him. But what of our Lady's eyes? These, methinks, should be black, like the skin of an over-ripe olive, velvety, fathomless, yet shining like twin caverns of coal. Eyes such as these in their ladies did the Romans and Greeks delight in, even as our countrymen do at the present day. Petrarch commends the black eyes of Laura in the second song of the Three Sisters, and in 'Garments green,' Ariosto praises the black eyes of Alcina and Angelica; Pontana those of Fannia in the First Book of his Loves; Propertius those of Cynthia in his Second Book; Horace those of Licus in his Ode, and again

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those of some other in his Polemic. Boccaccio, if my memory does not betray me, speaking of Fiammetta, says that her eyes resembled those of a falcon, which as we know cannot be surpassed for brilliancy. But here let me call to mind what I read in some great French writer, who, after mentioning a fact I have already remarked on, viz. that the Greeks and Romans both delighted in black eyes, added that he could not but marvel at the French and Germans who loved the eyes of their maidens to be clear, even, I believe, as the sapphire, for as such I have always seen them represented in the pictures of their greatest masters. Of such eyes Petrarch made mention in that song 'Silent I cannot be.' But each man to his taste, as for me I adore eyes of black." "Alack," said I, turning to Signor Ladislao,



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“how then can the fair Toronda, choicest of Nature’s works, be held to resemble our Lady in her eyes, seeing they are blue as the sapphire? However, I will not despair, for blue eyes are not without note, as can be seen in the letters of Ruscelli, and I shall always maintain that in beauty and charm they can well rank with the rarest and most exquisite of those you have described.” Then did Signor Vinciguerra resume his discourse. “’Tis not on their beauty,” said he, “that I do most chiefly insist, but rather on what they express; tenderness and pity should be in their regard, such as Ariosto described in his picture of the fair Alcina, and most rightly, for in good sooth ’tis in the depths of the eyes that the soul has its habitation, and if it be inconstant and shallow ’tis easy to be seen by their roving. They should

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turn gently on the beholder, brimming with that softness of pity that doth so become a fair virgin ; for in those to whom Nature has granted fair faces and forms full of grace 'tis not meet to discover hearts hard and cold as the diamond towards those in whose noble chaste lives they reign like the sun in heaven." These last words of the Signor Vinciguerra we judged to allude to the arrogance with which the lovely Picezza was ever wont to use you, and were the more confirmed in this opinion seeing that although he had taken upon him the task of maintaining her beauty against all comers yet she was not his mistress ; but he put a stop to our surmisings by saying that 'twas his aim to discover beauties the most perfect with which to adorn our Lady, and hardness of heart being unbecoming to a fair damsel,

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he did protest against it, maintaining that it would take from her somewhat of her charm. He added, moreover, that his intent when he was interrupted had been to point out a defect common to many fair dames, viz. cruelty, and not to attribute it to one from whom he hoped such an imperfection was entirely remote. Having thus cleared up the matter, he proceeded with his theme, saying: "I have shown that the eyes of our Lady should be black, steadfast in their regard and pitiful; furthermore they should be bright, vying in brilliancy with the stars as they gleam in the limpid depths of the midnight sky. Even such were the eyes of Daphne in her flight, and of Narcissus according to Ovid. Such those of Laura, as Petrarch declares in the sonnets, 'Love and I so full of wonder,' 'That ever painful,' and

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in other places besides. Such those of Amaranta in the pages of Sanazzaro; of Anthea the fair mistress of M. Tito Strozza the Elder in the First Book of his Loves; of Sulpicia in the Fourth Book of Tibullus, and of Cynthia in the Second Book of Propertius. Ariosto compares the eyes of Alcina in their brilliancy even to the sun, and Petrarch makes the same comparison in his sonnets: 'Some fortune to me came' and 'I saw on earth,' but later on he extols Laura's eyes even above the sun, saying:

'That have a thousand times the sun made  
envious.'

The eyelids should be a habitation worthy of the eyes, *i.e.* a marvel of beauty, with lashes long and black as Indian ebony, such as Petrarch declares that Laura was possessed

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of in the two above-quoted sonnets. The eyebrow, which Ariosto likened to an arch, should be of the blackest, softest and finest. But it is time I spoke of our Lady's brow, of which I will say without further intricacies that it should be broad, high, open, and lit with divine loveliness, in short, such as Petrarch describes Laura's in the sonnet 'Whence gathers Love the gold,' and Strozza the Younger his mistress's in the Second Book of his Loves."

✕ Signor Vinciguerra, having fulfilled his promise and the charge he had taken upon him, added to his discourse the following words:—"It seems to me only fair and just, most honoured sirs, and should in no wise cause you chagrin, that having shown what eyes and brow do best become our Lady, I should now compare the former with those

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black, large, and full of gentle gravity with natural sweetness blended, shining like two celestial fires within their lovely orbits, of the fair Picezza, our Lord Manino's chosen one, the unique Queen of Love and only daughter of the Graces ; that I should now compare them, I say, with her eyes, sweet lids, black lashes and black brows, leaving the brow (although as I do know full well I could maintain its charms against all rivals) for some other among you to match against his Lady's." But none would hearken to him, each and all at once denying the justice of his claim and declaring that, if it were admitted, their ladies would be put to shame. Signor Ladislao, who had hitherto occupied himself but little in the matter, having now waited until the clamour had somewhat subsided, speaking on behalf

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of the rest of the company, said :  
“ If the eyes of the lovely Picezza are like those of our Lady, shining like the sun, and graced with the charms, one and all, you have here described to us, so too, Signor Vinciguerra, are the eyes of the proud Arigone, never - too - much - to - be - praised mistress of the excellent Doctor, and of that White Rose whom the most noble Signor Giacomo worships, which with their serenity, for is not the Lady herself a compound of calmness and delight, and their brilliancy, which cannot be equalled, they can turn darkest night into brightest and clearest day. The eyes, too, of the Signora Ginevra da Coloreto have like charms, and with their potency have lured from its ancient fastness into their depths of smouldering fire the heart of our jocund Signor Pietro, and there burning and melt-

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ing it lies, like snow before the sun. Wherefore, Signor Vinciguerra consider well the case and you will see that 'tis an ill deed for any man being the lover of some noble lady to seek to exalt her by the defamation of others, and so much the greater is the evil by him wrought if those he would abase are alike worthy of honour with the one whom all his power he uses to uplift. Now, somewhat after the fashion whereby the fury of the waves was assuaged by the Alcioni, the loud claims of these gentlemen, jealous of the honour of their ladies as all true lovers should be, will be pacified and hushed by the matter having been placed in the hands of him whom, for that purpose and no other, we have elected judge." Mightily pleasing to all were these words of the Signor Ladislao, and thus was I left to decide which of



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all their ladies ought in justice and reason to be regarded as a model for the eyes, which for the eyelids, for the lashes, for the eyebrows, for the sweet brow of noble width, true sign of purity unrivalled, or for all the charms together with which our Lady is endowed. I will not deny, my Lord, that I here found myself in a great difficulty, and willingly would I have shifted the burden to other shoulders; however, having already made clear to them that judgment must not be precipitate, but ripened and mature, at my persuasion they did content themselves to await the ultimate perfection of our Lady, when judgment would be passed, not upon one only but upon all her charms, and easily it would then appear which of their mistresses was the most charming and the most beautiful. The matter

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thus adjusted and judgment deferred and assigned its proper sphere, the universal not the particular :

“ Now,” said Signor Giacomo, “ the matter ought to be proceeded with, and no more time lost.”

“ Oh, light is that loss,” said Signor Vinciguerra. “ Not so,” made answer the excellent Doctor ;

“ since it cannot be restored, but in faith a grave matter would it be to you and the Lady for whom you contend if we made no account of it.” “ How so,” retorted Signor Vinciguerra, “ think you to vanquish me? Has not the noise of my fame reached your ears?” “ Yes,

in truth,” answered the Signor Doctor, “ and ’tis by reason of that very fame that these gentlemen and I do hope to vanquish you, for have we not all heard tell of a dwarf named Atlante, a black swan, a little lame maiden Europa,

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sleeping dogs, Tigri, Pardi, Leoni, and various happenings." To these words Signor Vinciguerra answered not save by a smile, but he drew near the Doctor to assure himself, so scathing had been his speech, whether he mocked him or no. Becoming aware of his purpose we were consumed with laughter, though in so silent and careful a fashion that the Signor Doctor knew nothing of it. When it was over, and none of the company making any sign of proceeding, Signor Giacomo and the others desired that, of his courtesy, Signor Pietro would take up the thread of the discourse, wherefore he, after inclining his eyes to the ground for a short space, began in all cheerfulness: "The Signor Doctor having described the hair and Signor Vinciguerra the eyes, eye-





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brows and brow, I will complete the head of our Lady if your worships will deign to listen and yield me for a while your attention." All being silent and intent: "With the nose," proceeded Signor Pietro, "I will begin my discourse. This, if I am not in error, is so common to our species that mayhap we scarce appreciate it, and as at times ladies do use false tresses and men false locks, and even false eyes, 'tis like that did they discover themselves to be lacking a nose they would cunningly contrive some method of attaching a false one in its place with so much of skill that even those who approached near to examine it, could not distinguish it from the real thing. The Egyptians decreed as the punishment of adultery, and it may, for aught we know, be as meet in the present day, that

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the adulterer should be soundly flogged, and the adulteress deprived of her nose, for what reason save to render her deformed and hideous in that part wherein to beholders had hitherto lain her chief charm. The nose, therefore, must be one of our Lady's beauties, and, in my opinion, should be small, for in truth a large nose is a great disfigurement, as methinks I did read aforetime when I was a student, in the second Satire of Horace, and in that work of Mario Equicola, wherein he treats of the nature of Love; moreover, if I remember aright, small is the nose of Ariosto's beauteous Alcina. Thus, I say, it should be small and of so comely a shape that Momus himself could but praise and no envy detract from it. Having briefly depicted her nose, let me praise the fair cheeks of our Lady. Soft and

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smooth should they be, with the softness and whiteness of milk, and touched with a fresh, faint blush, like the morning's earliest rose. Fully with their sweetness do they please the eyes that behold them. In their tints of soft vermeil and white they recall the rare charm of the goddess, huntress and virgin alike, as in her beauty she slept after a tireless following of agile, fleet, antlered deer, does gentle and timorous, goats swift as the wind, and hares peeping and starting. Potent indeed is their charm when they blend the lily's white purity with the rose's soft glow, or the blush of the hyacinth with the clear cream of the privet ; or more than all if they are even as the snow upon frozen, untrodden peaks, touched by the dawn's first flush and merging with the rising sun into dazzling utter whiteness.



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Such were the cheeks of Alcina in which Ariosto delighted. Such those of Laura as Petrarch tells in his sonnet 'I will sing of Love,' and in his song which begins 'In that part.' Such, too, delighted Bembo in the second of his Asolani, and Sannazzaro in his Amaranta. Messer Ercole Strozza dwells on the same charm in the Second Book of his Loves and Messer Fausto Andreliino in the Third Book of his; in short it has always been pleasing to everyone that ever I heard of." Here paused for a moment's thought the Signor Pietro, then continuing, said: "With your good will I will now pass on to the mouth. This, when of compass small, adds no little grace to a virgin, and therefore 'tis small in the fugitive Daphne, as Ovid does tell in the first of his Metamorphoses, likewise in Polyx-

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ena in the thirteenth of the same ; Virgil also in the First Book of the *Æneid* praises the small mouth of Venus, goddess of Love, and Boccaccio that of Fiammetta. Bembo, too, describes as small the mouths of all his fair maidens. But the lips, to what shall I liken them? Boccaccio in his picture of Fiammetta compares them to sweet living rubies. Bembo does the same in his work quoted above, furthermore averring that in those who had grown weary they rekindled a desire to salute them. Sannazaro took pleasure in comparing or rather preferring them to the fresh morning rose in that sonnet quoted above and the Strozzi, both father and son, used a similar comparison. Petrarch in the second chapter of 'The Death' described Laura's in much the same way :

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‘ . . . then put to silence

Those roseate lips until that I did say.’

Others, such as Ovid, have compared the lips, or rather the mouth, to porphyry, but to my mind such comparison is less just than that of the ruby and the rose. Let us now bethink ourselves of the teeth of the Peerless One, and if I do seem to you somewhat o’er speedy in my discoursings pray believe that ’tis but natural in me to desire not to weary you ; for the discourses of the Signor Doctor and Signor Vinci-guerra with their sweet eloquence did so subtly wile away the time, that the hour grows late, and we must ere long seek repose.” Excusing himself thus Signor Pietro resumed the thread of his discourse : “ Petrarch in the sonnets : ‘ Whence gathers Love the gold,’ and ‘ Not only that a fair,’ and ‘ That ever painful’ ; Ariosto in the beauty of Alcina,

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Sannazzaro in that of Amaranta, and several other writers, whom, for lack of time, I will not now quote, desired and highly commended in all fair dames teeth like unto pearls. Like pearls were the teeth of Bembo's mistress as appears in his sonnet, 'Rippling locks of gold'; teeth like ivory did Petrarch commend in his dialogue of the unique graces of the body, and the same in his Lady did Messer Ercole Strozza bepraise in the Second Book of his Loves, and again Messer Ortensio Larido in the elegant little mouth of Fra Puccio's dead flea." These last words were spoken by Signor Pietro in so droll a manner that we could not forbear joining in his merry mood, until, once more grave, he went on to say: "Of that greatly beloved and valiant Lady, Zenobia, Queen of the Orient, I am sure

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your worships have read time and again, but mayhap with one thing that concerned her you are not acquainted." "And what is that?" asked Signor Ladislao. "A thing," answered Signor Pietro, "which is much to the point of our discoursing, viz. that, as Petrarch narrates in his dialogue of the dolours of the teeth, she possessed, among countless other charms, so exquisitely white a set of teeth, that when she did chance to speak or smile it seemed to the entranced beholder as if her mouth were lined with the most lustrous pearls. Again, who has not heard tell of the daughter of Mithridates, King of Pontus, and her marvellous double row of teeth; who of Prusias, King of Bithynia, or rather of that king's son, to whom Nature, a thing I never remember to have read of elsewhere, gave, not a row but one sole tooth in the

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upper jaw, extending from end to end of it and yet not spoiling his beauty. In order to fulfil my promise in every particular, I have now but to speak of the chin and the ears of our Lady ; that done, her head will be complete in all its charms, but time fails me to make mention of what the great writers have said on the subject, suffice it that I finish my task by saying that chin and ears should be like those other beauties on which we have discoursed at length, exquisite and beauteous to perfection." Thus ended the discourse of Signor Pietro, and the hour being now very late it was the good pleasure of all to postpone further discoursings until the ensuing night.



## PART II

It is, my Lord Messer Giovanni, a fact beyond all dispute, that not only to man, but also to those lower animals which have neither reason nor intellect, right agreeable and pleasant it is to look forward to the ending of the work that in all seriousness they have begun. Neither the one nor the other ever contemplate the cessation of their labour until that which they are engaged upon has arrived at its ultimate and proper perfection. More especially is this the case when a felicitous beginning has been made with all the parts in harmony. The man of wealth commences a spacious and handsome palace, and, beholding how fair is the foundation, rests



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not night nor day until it rises before him complete in all its magnificence. If an artist has begun to transfer to paper or canvas the exquisite head of some ancient or modern statue, is not his one thought how to complete his beautiful workmanship? Doth not the same thing occur among the brute animals? Wherefore, finding ourselves to have completed in the preceding part but a small portion of the task we have set before us, and having left our Lady, as many thousands of years since the world-famous Apelles was constrained by Death to leave his second picture of Aphrodite surrounded by her Loves, imperfect and incomplete, the great desire of our hearts is to go forward with her completion, proceeding in a manner worthy of the fair promise of her inception, having already on her behalf incurred some measure of

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fatigue, though not fatigue but rather supremest pleasure ought we to call the sensation experienced in such a cause. Therefore, the sun having ushered in a new day, and illumined hill and dale, we arose quickly, and flying our falcons soon brought down, thanks to the skillfulness of Signor Giacomo and Signor Pietro, wild duck and heron in plenty. Returning thus somewhat early to the palace that is like that of Alcina, of Logistilla, of Atlante, of Adamo and of the fairy Manto, described by Ariosto, and that of the Sun and of Fame by Ovid, and that of Psyche in the "Golden Ass" of Apuleius, we were regaled with the most delicate viands, and spent the remainder of the day, a matter of some three hours, in divers agreeable and joyous pastimes. Then the hour of supper arrived and we supped most royally,

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after which, our stools being drawn by the serving-men nearer the fire, we invited one another alternately to be seated, until all were placed as if in a manner on trial. Thus assembled together once more on the scene of our late discoursings, by common consent we prepared to resume our interrupted discussion of the various charms of our Lady, considering them carefully and minutely. The first voice that broke upon the silence was that of the Signor Doctor: "We read, honoured sirs and companions, that it was the custom of Apelles, by whom alone would Alexander the Great consent to be painted, to exhibit his works to the gaze of the populace, in order that, their defects being pointed out by one and another, he might be able to correct and render them perfect. By this means he arrived at so high

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a pitch of excellence that to praise him after his deserts, it would be needful to gather together all the praises that have been showered upon those who in their time were regarded as painters of note, and bestow them upon him, at the same time confessing that they in no wise express a due sense of his marvellous gifts, wherefore we should do wisely if, before passing on to the remaining charms of our Lady, we considered for a while most carefully the work we have already completed, with a view to amending or perfecting anything therein amiss." All agreeing to this, we found on going into the matter that we had endowed her with supreme perfection, save only in the case of the temples and of the nape of the neck, in which she was yet lacking. Whereupon, at once conceding and bestowing them upon

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her, we one and all agreed that we ought to proceed with our task without any further delay. Therefore rose to his feet the Signor Ladislao: "I do not know," said he, "that I have ever before witnessed in any gentlemen such great modesty as I do see continually in Signor Giacomo, who, when your worships prayed him yesterday to speak after the excellent Doctor, he being worthy to rank with the best of you, declined to accept the honour, refusing in such a manner that Signor Pietro followed his example, and save for Signor Vinciguerra I know not what would have befallen us. Thereafter he did so work upon his brother-in-law, that the latter to satisfy the company was forced to take the third place. Now he and I alone, excepting Messer the Judge, whose part 'tis not to join in the argument, remain

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yet to speak of our Lady after the manner ordered; and when I, as was but seemly, did desire to yield him the first place he received the offer after the fashion you have been witness to; however I do have faith that he will not be able to withstand the force of my final entreaty." For a few minutes Signor Ladislao was silent and then said: "Signor Giacomo, by that great love you have ever borne the fairest of fair White Roses to be found in all the gardens of the world I do beseech you of your courtesy to take precedence of me this night in our talk about our Lady, discoursing at what length you will and no longer." Whereat Signor Giacomo, inclining his regard in all pleasantness to him who had just spoken, made answer as follows:—"In all truth you have discovered a method of disarming

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my resistance which could not be matched did you search a hundred thousand years. For the sake therefore of that exquisite and most adorable of White Roses, by whom you have conjured me, or rather forced me to do your will, and in whose name I can deny nothing to whosoever may entreat me, I am fully content to continue the discourse on the charms of our Lady in the presence of you and of these other gentlemen, my good friends and masters." Having thus responded, he began, gently smiling, the following speech :—

✕ "A throat must support the exquisite head you have depicted, and in my opinion in colour it should be like unto that marble which, methinks, I have heard tell is to be found in the Island of Paros, *i.e.* of a whiteness that has never been

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rivalled by swan, lily, ermine nor  
snow."

✕ "Snow that has lain long on  
the earth, perchance?" interrupted  
Signor Vinciguerra.

✕ "Not so," answered Signor  
Giacomo; "you have misunder-  
stood me. Whiter than the un-  
trodden snow, newly fallen from  
heaven, should be the beauteous  
throat of our Lady."

✕ "Ah," answered the other, "now  
take I your meaning."

✕ He spoke in such wise that the  
company was moved to merriment  
till Signor Giacomo resumed his  
discourse with the words: "Such  
a throat did Sannazzaro commend  
in Amaranta, and many others  
whose names I cannot recall: whiter  
than milk was the fair throat of  
Laura, as Petrarch tells us in that  
song that begins 'In that part';  
of ivory was the throat of Nar-



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cissus, as in Ovid I read years ago."

✕ "Of ivory," again interposed Signor Vinciguerra, "how can that be? Why, 'tis like the fable of Pelops, of whom Virgil in the third of the Georgics, Tibullus in the first of his collected Elegies, and your Ovid in the sixth of his Metamorphoses, did relate that her left shoulder having been devoured by Ceres in that horrible feast, made by the impious and cruel Tantalus to the Gods, it was replaced by one of ivory, which deceived none, having naught of the true colour in it."

"Oh, why do you continue to make a mock of me, Signor Vinciguerra," sighed Signor Giacomo, adding, "when I said that the neck of Narcissus was of ivory, I meant not, as you do pretend, that it was actually of ivory, but white like unto ivory, and thus Ovid did desire

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it to be understood. Bembo, likewise, when in that sonnet 'Rippling hair of gold' he praises the white hands of his Lady, says :

'Ivory hand that snares and steals all hearts.'

Like unto ivory was that of the mistress of Strozza the Younger, as he bears witness in the second Book of his Loves. What Ariosto admired is clearly to be seen in the beauty of Alcina, which so oft already you have quoted. And therefore such a neck as I have described is the only one meet for our Lady. Now, descending somewhat, let us consider her bosom. This should be white, even as that of Laura, which Petrarch depicts in his sonnet, 'Love and I so full of wonder,' and that of Messer Ercole Strozza's mistress, which he praised in the above-quoted work. It should be

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beauteous and even angelic, such as Petrarch doth praise in his canzoni, 'When she, the faithful comforter,' and 'Waters fresh and clear and sweet.' But what shall I say of her breasts? These, in my opinion, should be small, round, soft and firm like two sweet round apples. Such were those of Sannazzaro's Amaranta, and of Bembo's youthful Sabrinetta. From Ariosto I will not quote, though full well I know that his opinion scarce differs from these others. Nor does Boccaccio's in his 'Labyrinth of Love,' wherein he speaks of two withered fruits, meaning, the breasts of that widow whom he held in much ill favour, 'though perhaps, aforetime,' he added, 'they might have been sweet as young apples, delightful to touch and to sight.'"

At this point Signor Giacomo became silent, whereupon the Signor

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Doctor, looking at him, said :  
“Methinks I do perceive, signor mine, a fine opportunity of returning you tit-for-tat. Since, if I mistake not, the end of our discoursings is as far from the beginning and the beginning from the end, as are our feet and our eyes the one from the other. And of this the reason is clear to me. In some of our errors we resemble the bird of Minerva, in others, mayhap, that of Jove. Wherefore, with great understanding, Prometheus, having created man, did fasten to his shoulders two bags, of the which that at the back visible to ourselves was filled with sins, while that in the front visible to others had been ripped up and emptied of them.” At these words Signor Giacomo rising to his feet said : “Excellent Doctor, since my simpleness has not found favour with you, and you desire but to

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censure and ridicule me, I (a thing you have not done, and which yet is magnanimous, as may be learnt from the great Julius Cæsar, who forgot nothing save only the injuries done to him) hereby forgive you, not wishing to contend with you in the matter, for that would be more disagreeable to me than I can say. But certain am I that if your excellency did but know the greatness of the love I do bear you, you would have excused me, and greatly tempered your speech towards me. But returning to our Lady, I was just now discoursing, if my memory fail me not, on the charms of her breast, and having already described them to my mind it is but fitting that I should now pass on to her back and her shoulders. In a man 'tis handsome and befitting that his shoulders be broad, even such as the great Virgil extols in the person

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of Æneas in the Second Book of the Æneid, and although I have no authority in the case of a Lady, nevertheless if her shoulders also are broad I shall not complain, especially if they be elegant and beauteous, and as we would wish to see them. These then are among her charms, and besides being pleasing and delightful to behold, they should be so soft to Love's touch that the contact inflames desire. In the arms, to which we now come, no small beauty will be discerned if delicate, softly rounded and velvet smooth they do appear, like Laura's in the song 'If weak the thread to which depends,' and in the sonnet 'From those most beauteous eyes.' But they will not reach the height and summit of beauty unless they likewise boast the snowy whiteness that pleased Sannazzaro in the arms of the

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fair Amaranta and her friends and companions. To the arms must be added the hands, which to please me must also be white, such as Petrarch praises in Laura in the above-quoted song, and again in the sonnet which begins 'Orso, was never stream.' White, I say, with the whiteness of ivory such as Bembo describes in the oft-quoted sonnet 'Rippling locks of gold'; thus will they attain that perfection which in Laura inspired Petrarch's cry 'O lovely hand.' Fine also should they be as in that thrice-quoted song, and long, even as Cynthia's in the Second Book of Propertius, and like those Messer Ercole Strozza commends in the Second Book of his Loves, adding that they were marvellous in their whiteness. Furthermore they should be soft and gleaming, with fingers more exquisite than those of

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Bacchus and more to be admired than those of Narcissus ; yea, even such as to rouse the envy of Juno, Venus and Febo's chaste sister, as did the sweet hands of Anthea in the pages of Messer Tito Strozza. Thin they must not be, nor should the blue veins show, but each fair finger rosy tipped, with nails like Orient pearls, even as Laura's in that recently-quoted sonnet.

✕ "'Tis now time that I for a brief space dwelt on the fair shape of our Lady, her curving hips, her rounded frame ; beauteous should be that form, divinely fair, of grace celestial, even as Petrarch sings in his canzone 'From thought to thought' and again in that sonnet 'From time to time.' Slender also should it be, and compound of all excellences, lithe, erect, snowy white, alluring, entrancing ; wondrous as that of Diana when beheld by the



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ill-fated Actæon." · Here ceased Signor Giacomo, a half smile on his lips, for he knew what might next be said, yet paused doubting, fearing to say it. While we waited, expectant, Signor Ladislao arose: "Honoured sirs," said he, "duty, not riper knowledge, urges me to continue, for it doth appear to me fitting that I rather than Signor Giacomo, who has done his part in the matter, should now take up the thread of our discourse and with your leave complete the portrait of our peerless Lady. If thereafter it should please any other of the company to speak further on the matter time enough will remain and plenty of matter for argument." "Oh," said Signor Giacomo, "do not revive, my dear signor, that iniquitous custom of the ancients which prescribed a limited time to those who defended a cause, and

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likewise to the accusers, measuring the given period by timepieces of water which, drop by drop, stealing the minutes did soon put an end to their pleading; and hence with much haste they proceeded to the great detriment of their cause. Do not revive it, I say, of your courtesy, thus putting an end to my talking, when the charms of our Lady I seek, with heart and words warmed to the matter, to place one by one before you, not as it were from experience but rather from inspiration." To this argument the Signor Ladislao could not do aught than give way and abandon himself to the pleasure of Signor Giacomo, whereupon the latter, having thus skilfully removed any further bar to his discourse, now continued: "Having reached unawares that part from whence we all came into the world, with your leave I should

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like to say, that I ever have greatly marvelled, it being a source of pleasure and common to all feminine things, at the excessive care with which every dame and maiden seeks to hide its existence from us. Plainly is this care apparent in Ullania and her companions in the pages of Ariosto ; in Fotide in the 'Golden Ass' of Apuleius ; in Diana surprised by Actæon, laving her sweet shape in the spring, in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid ; also in Olympia, in the aforesaid pages of Ariosto, and again in Petrarch in his greatest song. When I read that Tiresias was blinded by Pallas for beholding her charms unbared, I did bethink me that, although similar instances are to be found in the Fourth Book of Propertius, in Seneca's tragedy entitled 'Œdipus,' in the *Ambra*, *Nutricia*, and the *Miscellanies* of Politian,

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and lastly in the chapter of Ariosto that begins : ' From my black pen,' such dire punishments befell the offender, because 'twas against her will the Lady had been beheld naked, a thing that so greatly displeases them, that until death sets her free no truly noble dame would relax her care to conceal that particular part from the gaze of all men whatsoever. Thus I have read in Ovid that Polyxena, whom Petrarch doth mourn in his sonnet : ' In such a star,' suffered death rather than discover it. Also Olimpias, mother of the great Alexander, as we read in Justinian's pages, endeavoured even in the throes of death to veil that privy part with her head and her hair. Truly Nature has here operated in a manner that fills me with a desire to pierce the secrets of her bosom so that I may perceive the reason

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for that which doth perplex and fill me with bewilderment. But when I have wearied myself with questionings I do find that she has implanted this instinct in woman, because among their members it has pleased her to ordain that one shall be regarded as shameful and another not, and therefore the one must be hidden while the other may be displayed. So that the head being without shame is frequently to be seen uncovered, as likewise are the hands and various other parts, but that privy part of which now I am speaking, so shameful a member is regarded that we all with one accord conceal it; we all, I say, because not only do ladies, but we ourselves have this instinct; hence the holy Augustine says in the fourteenth chapter of his 'City of God,' that 'tis the common usage and practice



*Placido Fabo*



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of all men to conceal the privy parts, some barbarians even in the baths concealing them from view with one or other of their garments. Those Roman youths who exercised themselves naked on the Field of Mars concealed these secret parts. But if the reason I have given for this thing holds good and appears to you not unworthy of acceptance, how then can we say that this part is more shameful in a woman than it is in a man, or that from their sex is demanded more modesty than from ours, seeing that the same Nature has created both one and the other ; so that if by chance and ill fortune a man and a woman together are drowned in the sea, would he be discovered on his back and she with face downwards? But let us now leave further talk on this matter and return to the point whence we



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started." "I did expect," Signor Pietro interrupted, turning towards Signor Giacomo, "you would have cited the proverb that is used to rebuke those who distinguish not 'twixt modesty and shamelessness. That proverb says that neither can such folk distinguish 'twixt the body and its raiment in man or in woman." "And I," said the excellent Doctor, "expected that he would relate what happened to our first parents, who, having disobeyed the Most High, became suddenly aware of their nakedness and felt shame of it, seeking to cover themselves with leaves in so far as they were able." "We indeed," added the two remaining members of our company, "expected that his excellency would quote from Homer, who, in the Odyssey, tells how Ulysses being 'scaped from the fury of the angry

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sea, did take refuge in his nakedness under a tree in the country of Alcinous, now called Corfu, and there, concealing his secret parts, did become enamoured of the beauty of Nausicaa, daughter of the prince." "Oh," answered Signor Giacomo, "as you have quoted these examples, small service 'twould be for me to repeat them. Let us therefore go forward and discourse for a while on these hidden beauties of our Lady. To my mind they do appear as a garden, red and white with the passionate blossoms of spring, through whose scent-laden air throbs the nightingale's sad lament, and wherein we may sometimes wander with great rejoicing of spirit. In such wise did Ariosto praise the hidden beauties of Angelica, likening them to a garden filled with rare and ex-

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quisite flowers, through which the amorous air, whispering of hidden delights, beguiles the intruder with the hope that to him and him only is this wealth of beauty discovered. To the other parts near by it is time to refer, these should be neither large nor small, but preserve a happy medium, for to incline either to the former or the latter is to spoil the fair proportions of a Lady's dainty form. Large and small were equally pleasing to Horace, as we learn from the second of his Satires, but to-day the vulgar alone take pleasure in the former, and hence it is, as Boccaccio tells in his Labyrinth of Love, that that widow, of whom we have already made mention, did study to exhibit herself as large as possible in that respect, believing it to be no small part of a woman's comeliness. But let us

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leave her and the vulgar to their opinion, and I will adhere to mine. Of those columns of alabaster, the thighs, which maintain the sweet body of the Peerless One, even as do the foundations some beauteous and splendid edifice, what ought I to say in the presence of your worships? Truly, methinks, 'tis better, as the historian said of Carthage, to be silent than to say too little; yet that shall not prevent me from declaring they should be smooth, rounded, voluptuous, and of a beauty fit to make part of the supremely perfect whole; in short the most exquisite 'tis possible to imagine, not from the hands of Phidias and Lysippus, the famous sculptors, but from those of Nature herself, who is far more versed in such matters than either of these great men." Here Signor Giacomo made a pause, then took up his

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speech anew: "Already do I begin to behold the goal at the which I have striven to arrive and being thus near it, I must not stay in my course but rather speed on the faster. Thus I say that the legs, whereto we have now come, should be fashioned after the manner one sees a marble column, *i.e.* of good length yet rounded; such Horace commends in the Second Book of his Verses, and again in his Epodo when describing a fair young damsel. If examined they shall be tender, delicate and softly curved, and consequently beautiful to behold. Virgil in his Moreto describes with scorn the legs of Cibale, in that they were thin and bony, and, moreover, terminated in broad, big feet. Having descended thus far let me say that the feet of our Lady should be white as those of Tetide, which Homer compares to

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silver and Statius to snow on account of their marvellous whiteness. I desire, furthermore, to put it in brief, that they should resemble those of Alcina, commended by Ariosto, which were small, arched and rounded." Here at last with a smile Signor Giacomo made an end to his discourse, having completed in full the exterior charms of our Lady; but fearing lest some should discover aught to criticise or oppose, we began one and all to examine her with the utmost care and minuteness. Seeing us thus spending the time in somewhat useless fashion, Signor Pietro could not forbear rising to his feet and discoursing thus: "We read that Zeuxis, the painter, having portrayed Helen, as has already been said, stayed not for the judgment of others, but himself said at once: 'Tis not a thing misbecom-

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ing nor derogatory to the Trojans, and still less to the Greeks, to undergo long travail and labour for such an one, seeing that none can behold her without comprehending her worthiness to be ranked with the immortal goddesses.' We, if my judgment deceive me not, can fitly repeat his last words and declare that this Lady of ours is so lovely to look upon that in all verity we can compare her to the goddesses, and to which of them? Why truly to those who in all their naked loveliness came to Mount Ida for the judgment of Paris, happiest of shepherds. And if yet again to another we seek to liken her we shall easily find her compeer in the goddess for whom gladly did Troy suffer burning and devastation : I speak of Venus—the fairest of the fair. Of her there are two

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world-famous statues, wrought by Praxiteles, noblest of sculptors, one of which (that sold by him to the people of Cnidus) did by its utter and irresistible perfection draw thitherwards endless streams of pilgrims, eager and anxious to behold it, one of whom it did so excite and inflame that when night came on he would fain have lain with it. Yet, which of us, in comparing these statues with our Lady, would not pronounce them totally inferior, and in truth far less charming and less fair. Which of us, fair sirs, if 'twere given him to behold the divine loveliness of Aphrodite rising up from the sea, the which the ingenious and gifted Apelles did depict with such consummate skill that the Emperor Augustus dedicated his masterpiece to the temple of Julius Cæsar, would not stoutly maintain that



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'twas our Lady who bore away the palm of beauty? I am more than confident that if that same Apelles had been able to complete for his countrymen the picture which 'twas his intent to render even fairer than his first one, and of which he did but sketch out the head and shoulders (so perfect however in their beauty that all the painters of that time were frightened away and not one would dare attempt to complete it), he would not have succeeded in such fashion as to make it worthy of being compared with our Lady. But what say you all, shall our Lady be clad or no?" To which the excellent Doctor made answer: " It cannot be denied that, as says Ariosto, fine clothes at times enhance beauty; but the contrary is more often the case, and he himself, when praising the fair and charm-

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ing Olympia, did indite the following exquisite verses:—

‘ But the finest silk or the purest gold  
Ever worked by Florentine hands of old,  
Using up much time and labour and thought  
If to my Lady fair ’twere brought  
Could not add to her stature nor add to  
her grace  
Nor find her among the Gods a place.’

Is not Plutarch’s opinion on the matter also quite clear, for he says: ‘A lady is far more beauteous unclad than bedecked with garments of purple,’ and again in the second part of his ‘Golden Ass’ Apuleius makes so great a point of it that in order to show how far more beauteous his fair one is naked to the eye than covered with gold, despoils her of all her garments, even her chemise. I do bethink me, moreover, what I did read of Phryne, the courtesan, who, being sum-

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moned to appear before a court of justice, and fearing lest the sentence should go against her, swept aside her draperies and revealed her fair body, the beauty of which so worked upon the judges that they set her at liberty, relieved of all embarrassments. From which you will understand that although fine attire is not without value, and she who is wealthy will go superbly adorned, yet more beautiful far is naked loveliness. I cannot forbear mentioning the tale of Candaules who, as Justinian relates, permitted his friend Gyges to behold his beautiful wife with all her charms revealed, whereupon Gyges, having become mightily enamoured of her, did put him to death, and forthwith entered into possession both of her and the kingdom. This would never have come about had he only beheld her clothed. There-

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fore in conclusion I will say, if your worships will deign to hearken to my opinion, that we ought by no means to endeavour to clothe the imaginary figure of the Peerless One, for have I not clearly shown you that a lady of so many charms, though fair she may be in magnificent garments, is fairer far in all her naked loveliness." "Oh," said Signor Vinciguerra jestingly, "I misdoubt me she will die of cold in this inclement weather." "That cannot be," answered the excellent Doctor, "seeing she is not yet born." "Well," retorted the other, "if she be not yet born we can clothe her in garments not yet made. But no matter, let us leave these sophistries for the present, or, as the proverb says, we shall find ourselves in a lane that has no turning," said Signor Giacomo, and taking up his discourse anew pro-

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ceeded: "Following the good counsel of the Signor Doctor and not seeking to bedeck our fair Lady with garments of divers colours, may we not yet permit for her use those things that of yore only the greatest of dames were wont to indulge in, viz. the perfumes of the rose, orange flower, musk, ambergris, heliotrope and other such sweet-smelling essences that are the delight of fair ladies?" "Bestow on her artificial allurements," interposed his kinsman with great heat and anger; then composing somewhat his features he added, "But you are not in earnest, Signor Giacomo, you do jest in order to prove us. For were you truly in earnest what answer could we make to you save that such things appertain not to the Peerless One; since of all charms she is possessed of what use to her manufactured fra-

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grance? Musk and ambergris, forsooth, why seek you to give them to her? Is she perchance afflicted with some unpleasing odour? Does she taint with her malodorous presence the air that surrounds her? A thousand curses light on him who such things dare aver, fit object is he for our ruthless condemnation. But read what Petrarch says in his Dialogue of Sweet Odours, therein you will find much new light on the matter. In short, Signor Giacomo, 'tis mighty distasteful to me that our Lady should be charged with such trifles, chiefly because it would seem to betray a lack in her whom we deem perfectly pure and perfectly beautiful. Now if your speech was meant but in jest, I do praise and commend it because a little laughter wiles time away pleasantly; but did you not rather seek to make mock of us,

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seeing that hitherto naught has been said in praise of paint, wash, or make-up as they call it in some parts of Italy, nor of the lady's red and white, for which, as Ariosto says, Signor Chinaccia was remarkable?"

"I do greatly marvel," was Signor Ladislao's answer to these words, "that you, Signor Pietro, permit not our Lady her perfumes, and the more so that your arguments reflect but little credit upon her. Pray tell me of your courtesy: think you to find one dame, I speak only of those that are fair, who hath no sort of sweet-smelling water, in the which to dip her sweet and lovable face? To the best of my belief you shall not find such an one; and if none such there are, custom doth contradict the first of your arguments against the use for our Lady of divers delicate perfumes, and do you wish to break







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through custom? Secondly you say you forbid her such essences, because being herself not ill-smelling she doth not require them. O Signor Pietro, meseemeth you do greatly err, for fair youths and sweet maidens, when that they do love, delight in the use of the rarest and most exquisite perfumes, not in order to disguise some ill odour in themselves, but because such do afford great pleasure and delight, and should therefore be held a good thing. Wherefore 'tis my counsel that you deprive not our Lady of her perfumes, for if she doth find you obdurate in refusing her that wherein she doth place so great store, rest assured she will hold you in an odium only equalled by that wherein were held serpents and, in Courts, truth. Oh," he added, "how true it is that in the pleasure denied us we do take far

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greater delight than in any that are permitted." Keen almost as the hawk which, rising in the air, beholds wild duck or dove, Signor Pietro now spoke : " If I do not persuade your worships that scented waters and essences are by no means worthy of our Lady, truly no arts of persuasion will aught avail that ever I may use in my life." Then turning to Signor Ladislao he said : " If the arguments I have brought forward do not weigh with you, nor are worthy of acceptance, neither are your contrary statements made up to the present ; for instance you told me 'twas not my place to break through the custom to be found among all beauties of bathing their faces in sweet-smelling waters, and were silent when I did laugh thereat, for in truth speech without reason is naught to those of sound mind, and if the excellent

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Doctor will bear witness to the truth, he will tell us that lawyers and doctors are wont to declare they feel ashamed if ever they find themselves speaking without reference to law. You tell me a certain custom is good, I maintain it is bad. Tell me, I pray you: these ladies whose custom it is to use divers perfumes, to what end do they use them? Simply that they may thereby become more charming and alluring. If this be their reason, doth it not prove that they are not contented with the charms God has bestowed upon them? That they must be ill content therewith, and conceive they do lack something, no sound intellect can forbear concluding. But of that we will discourse in plenty to-morrow night, when of artificial charms we speak, whereof some talk there must be among us.

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Now I come to the second of your arguments. You tell me that youthful gallants and fair maidens are wont to use exquisite perfumes, not to conceal some ill odour, the which they in truth have not, but for to please others, and that it is in sooth a good custom; I answer, I am willing to grant you that 'tis for the pleasure of others they do exhale musk and ambergris, on condition you on your side will grant 'tis not unknown to make use of this method to cover up many defects. Martialis and Petrarch both admit this. But supposing this be not so, is it in truth well to use them for the pleasure of others? In good sooth no, for in many do they arouse unholy desires; if you do not believe me, read what Petrarch says in the afore-quoted dialogue. Moreover, Messer Ortensio Lando in the funeral dis-

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course that he did put into the mouth of Monna Tessa da Prato on the death of a cock of hers said: 'I do firmly believe that if the Grand Turk knew this secret, he would not perfume himself with the syrup of musk, as is his wont when he goes to the jousts in the seraglio': 'tis the jousts of Love to which here he refers. As to those who assure me that these essences are in themselves a good thing I think I have already answered them; but I cannot refrain from adding that indeed are they bad, and this, by your leave, I will proceed to prove to you in the presence of these gentlemen, if you will do me the favour to listen to me. I have read that one Planzio, a gentleman of Rome, finding himself in great peril of death, did hide himself right carefully in I know not what place; but what happened?

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Why this, that having been diligently sought for, and nowhere found, he was betrayed by the odour of musk, with the which he had so liberally besprinkled himself that the air all around him was full of it, and this coming to the noses of those that made search, was the occasion of his most miserable death. I have also read of a youth, who being come heavily perfumed into the presence of the Emperor Vespasian to render him thanks for some advancement that had been bestowed upon him, Vespasian suddenly became aware of the odour, and bending his brows in a terrible frown said in a stern voice : ‘ I would rather you had come hither smelling of garlic ’ ; and having thus spoken, dismissed him, without honours (for the letters conferring that already bestowed were now cancelled), to the consolations of his

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musk and his ambergris. Now bethink you if the effects proceeding from the use of the aforesaid perfumes should not be reckoned bad rather than good. Do you not esteem them bad in the case of the powerful and famous city of Rome? In the year of her building, 565, she issued a decree forbidding any to bring thither perfumes or essences from foreign parts; this edict might have endured even to the present day, but the wickedness and vices of those that came after would not permit it, and as 'tis the custom of the moderns to break the decrees of the ancients, so did they break and annul it; and thus she who had overcome and vanquished the peoples of Assyria, Arabia and Sheba, by sheer force of arms, was now in her turn overcome and vanquished by their odours and perfumes, insomuch, that at last no



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banquet was complete without them, and even in her shows and her wines they were a feature. Were they not evil in the case of the city of Sparta, once almost a Grecian Rome? When they first crept in from Asia, she kept them at bay with the strictest of laws and of edicts ; but little these availed against the insidious squadron of odours and evils, which did corrupt and lead astray her guards, and so, effecting an entrance, and passing into Europe, conquered and overcame her. What happened to Hannibal? This invincible enemy of Rome, implacable, austere and indefatigable, was, with his skilful and most valiant followers, rendered so supine and effete by the use of seductive essences, that in the very midst of the war he was overwhelmed and subdued ; oh, is't not easy to conceive his maledictions and curses

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on that enemy within his camp? But why should I heap example upon example, for is it not already as clear as the noonday that these perfumes, musk, ambergris and what not, are evil rather than good, and from the effects of anything must not one judge whether that thing in itself is evil or no?" Here Signor Pietro became silent, awaiting the reply of his opponent, the which, as if from sleep just awakened, rose up and made answer as follows:—"You, Signor Pietro, who have laboured so greatly and with such evidences of knowledge in defence of your argument, have brought us to this point with much charm, but certes you have not convinced us. Well do I know that the effects of these odours and essences is not always disastrous, but the reverse in the greater number of cases; and though you cannot

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upbraid me now, as once before in the discourse, for my silence, yet I will content myself with one, or, at the most, with a couple of examples, just as you have done more than once already this evening. We read that a certain ferryman called Phaon was so honest, that he never cheated anyone and indeed would not accept payment from those who could ill afford it. Now it happened that in Lesbos, where he plied his calling, his practices excited no little admiration; everyone, even Venus, their goddess as they called her, did praise and commend him most highly. One day she presented herself before him in the shape of an old woman and demanded to be conveyed to the other side of the river. Phaon without a word assisted her into his boat and conducted her as speedily as possible

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to the place where she desired to land ; arrived there he would accept neither thanks nor payment. What then could the goddess do for him ? This, she bestowed upon him a phial of sweetest musk, the smell of which transformed him from the old man that he was into the most beautiful youth that ever was seen in Lesbos or indeed in all the world. What say you, Signor Pietro ? ” he added, “ was not the effect of this musk most marvellous ? And was’t not well done to transform an old man, with one foot in the grave, to a youth in the flower of his age, more beautiful to behold than he had ever been in his life ? ” “ Oh,” answered Signor Pietro, “ you must indeed be cast in a passing strange mould if you can give credence to such tales ; and if you insist on the truth of this marvel pray attribute so wondrous

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a power to Venus and not to the musk, and your protestations will carry more conviction. But continue, if so be you have other evidence to bring forward, the which I do misdoubt." "Speedily will I convince you," rejoined the other, and proceeded as follows:—"Do we not read in the Gospel that He who for us did hang upon the Cross and suffer death consented to the bathing and anointing of His most sacred feet with sweet-smelling and very precious ointment of spike-nard? Never would the great Son of God have permitted this if good results therefrom could not be expected, or if the ointment in itself was not to be held most precious and desirable." "Oh, of your courtesy, be silent," made answer Signor Pietro; and then went on to say: "I repeat that from such things no good effects ever

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come. Jesus allowed it, not because some good might be expected to result, and still less because the ointment was (as will be confirmed by all who do use it) exquisite, delicate, and compounded of delights, but rather because He was touched by the tears and compassion of her who offered it. But if these words of mine are not sufficient to convince you, Signor Ladislao, let us take a final example, the which may perhaps bring you over to my side, although those I have as yet put forward have been vainly set before you. It is written that Domenico Silvio, thirty-first Doge, according to Sabellico, and thirtieth according to others, of the wonderful city of Venice, had for a wife a native of Constantinople, who, disdaining ordinary water, was accustomed to bathe in dew, and, disliking to touch her food

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with her hands, made use of a golden fork with the which to convey it to her lips. The room, moreover, in which she was wont to sit was so pervaded with the languorous odour of divers perfumes that those who did enter in straight-way became unconscious. What was the working, in this case, of Him who governs the universe and from whom nothing is hid? Why this, that in the end, this votary of the odours, perfumes and essences you do persist in desiring to bestow upon our Lady in spite of all right and reason, fell sick of a loathsome and horrible malady, from which she eventually died in the greatest possible misery. Will it not now be your good pleasure, Signor Ladislao, to relinquish the opinion you have so stoutly maintained, and admit to-night that not only are these scents and essences un-

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becoming to men, but even more so to those ladies that have a care of their virtue, and will never consent to part with it, among whom our Lady stands chief? And though you might even now tell me that some odours are conducive to health, and ought therefore to be made use of, I would answer you that, if they are used solely to recover the health of the body, and by no means for vanity and voluptuous delight, then in good sooth is their use lawful and right, provided it be confined within the limits of temperance, that salt that should season all things." At this point Signor Pietro paused for a moment and then exclaimed: "Oh, who can say enough in dispraise of these things which I now, and until the end of my life, shall hold in abhorrence? Who of sane mind (and this might be added to my



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arguments) could commend one who, desiring something, should so use it that others would delight therein, but she herself be unable to enjoy it? Truly whatever gallants or ladies besprinkle themselves with the perfumes and essences I despise, must find themselves in such plight, for the perfumes in question being upon their own persons they can neither smell nor enjoy them, others only having that pleasure, and thus it doth come about that she only is perfect in excellence, who is known, when she has the power thus to entice and ensnare the hearts of others, to revolt against the thought of exercising it. But I desire to hasten to a close, and, having clearly demonstrated to your worships that sweet-smelling odours and essences are not for so peerless a Lady as ours, I will just add that such things being in themselves

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delightful and pleasant, their enjoyment at the hands of others need be forbidden and prohibited to none. Let us, therefore, follow the example of good St Augustine, who, speaking of pleasant perfumes and odours, said: 'Of such I take no heed. When remote from them I seek not after them, and when in their proximity I refuse them not, but am ever prepared to relinquish them and to live my life without them.' " Thus did Signor Pietro bring his discourse to an end, and some time elapsed before another word was spoken; at last the excellent Doctor broke the silence, and as we sometimes see a crane walk a few steps, and then gradually soar upwards, even so he, in a low voice that gradually increased in volume, took up the thread of the discourse: "Signor Pietro, with his most sweet discoursing, which

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may be compared to that of her whom I hold most dear, has so beguiled me that I am persuaded our Lady ought not, as he told us at the beginning of his argument, to make use of musk, ambergris and other such odours and essences, but does he wish us, moreover, to make her forswear, as unbecoming to her perfections, roses, violets, and other sweet-scented blossoms and fruits? If so, neither Heaven, Fate, nor mankind will support him. The scent of these things is in no wise to be compared with the aforesaid, and in truth I do not remember ever to have read that they are displeasing to sweet maidens or amorous gallants at any time of the year. Virgil in a beautiful elegy commands the virgins to gather roses and therewith to bedeck themselves. The fair Proserpine and her maidens in the Fifth

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Book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, go a-gathering roses on the verdant and flowering shores of the Lake Perguso. Salmace, likewise, in the Fourth Book doth delight herself among fair blossoms. Sannazzaro tells how Amaranta and her companion despoiled the meadows of their glory and filled their bosoms with the fragrance of violets. And speaking in great distress to his mistress, who had abandoned him to himself, and fled in disdain and disorder, he said: 'Dost thou forget those earliest of lilies and of roses for which I searched far and near in the country in order to bring to thee?' In the sonnet 'Two fresh roses' Petrarch describes how to Laura and her lover were given two exquisite roses as the seal and sanction of their love by a man old in years but fresh as ever in heart. And again in the song 'Waters

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clear and fresh and sweet' he tells how the fair Laura on a certain Holy Friday, as after a journey she leant in gentle languor against a tree which soared upwards like a column behind her, was enveloped in a cloud of scented blossoms, showered upon her from the flowering branches above. Furthermore in the sonnet 'Love and I so full of wonder' she is also to be seen among the flowers. In fact all these writers openly aver that to youth, and in particular to fair damsels, most seemly and befitting it is to bedeck themselves with fresh garlands of flowers, and thus to be depicted, even as the peacock is depicted with innumerable eyes in its tail. I should marvel not if Aphrodite, goddess of beauty herself, when disporting on a day with her Cupid, as one reads, in a lovely and flowering country, did seek in

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pretty rivalry to gather more flowers than the little god. Neither should I marvel if the same goddess (as Libanius, a Greek sophist, in the pages of Politian, doth maintain), when she went forth to match her beauty against that of Athene and Juno, under the eye of the fortunate Paris, did seek to enhance her charms with odorous roses and green leaves twisted in cunning fashion 'mid the golden glory of her hair. I marvel not that Catullus and Ariosto both say that enamoured gallants and maidens love the rose above all flowers, seeking always to gather it without a prick from its thorns. Moreover, roses and violets and other sweet-smelling delicate blossoms, besides their power to increase the loveliness of fair ladies (as may be seen from the above-quoted story of Venus, who used them to adorn her golden

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tresses), have a most refreshing effect on the mind, and comfort and raise the spirits, as any day may be proved. And if Signor Pietro," added the excellent Doctor, turning to us, "is yet unwilling that, for her adornment, of which in good sooth she has little need, our Lady shall carry roses in her hair or on her white breast, let him content himself at least with the belief that as it is she who doth so wear them, they must e'en be good and not evil like the perfumes the desirability of which Signor Ladislao did so stoutly but wrongfully maintain, so that he may pardon me and continue me in his favour. And you, Signor Giacomo, rejoice in the fair fresh dawn, which each day heralds the light, ushers in sweet and pleasant days, and paints the face with the rosy hue of Venus." "How with the rosy hue of Venus?" said Signor

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Giacomo. "Oh!" answered the excellent Doctor, "If I had joined red with white perhaps you would have understood me; but listen, because I will tell you how your Lady, the White Rose, in whom all your thoughts are centred, comes to have cheeks tinged with soft blushes. We read that Venus, of whom we have discoursed above, loved the beautiful Adonis, and was beloved by Mars. Now it happened that Mars, inflamed by jealousy, determined to slay Adonis, believing that the great love Venus bore him, in spite of himself, would then cease. Finding therefore a fair opportunity, and discovering him in repose he wounded and killed him. Venus, running to his aid in great haste, fell into a rose bush, and one of the thorns thereof piercing her foot, blood did begin to flow, and bedewed the rose, so that



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that which had heretofore been pure white was now turned to vermeil and red. Granting, therefore, to our Lady, as 'tis but befitting we should, these flowers and blossoms, roses and violets, of which the gardens of Pestus presented so great a variety, should we not also allow her one of the three golden apples of Atalanta? An apple, I say, such as that which the nymph Cidippe did bemock, or those in the gardens of the Hesperides, or of the fortunate and happy King Alcinous, or chief of all, that prize of beauty for which three bared goddesses strove, as has been related above? Yes, we will grant them to her, for that they have an excellent odour, and have naught of evil in them; so that some peoples do live upon them, and others upon their smell; the which may seem to you somewhat of a

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marvel but we have it of Petrarch in the sonnet 'As life eternal is with God to be,' and in the song 'Truly as I believed to pass,' and again in that Dialogue already quoted on pleasant and good odours. Pliny likewise refers to it in the second chapter of the Seventh Book of his Natural History and Solinus and others confirm the truth of it. The story runs that there lives by the Ganges in India, a certain people called the Astomi, having no mouths, and very hairy bodies, which they clothe in some kind of raiment made from the leaves of the trees that grow in those parts. These having no other food (for in sooth they could not partake of it an they would) do nourish themselves solely upon the odour exhaled by a certain kind of apple which they carry upon them. When they go on a pilgrimage

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they take naught with them save these fruits that breathe life, and do fly from putrid odours and stench, for as sweet odours do nourish them, so ill odours bring them to death. Great pleasure have I taken in relating this thing to your worships," continued he, "for that it doth show how right good and wholesome are apples (of which I could furnish you a thousand other examples), and moreover it serves to correct an error into which some have fallen, among whom is Bonfadio in that letter, in the second volume of the writings of divers authors, he wrote to Messer Plinio Tomacelio wherein he said, in short, that if some have told of countries where animals do live by smell, they did mean that the inhabitants thereof by smell did live more healthily and happily and attain a greater age.

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This is most false reasoning, for in good sooth 'tis certain, as the authors I have quoted clearly prove, that these people have no mouths, and having none 'tis easy to believe that indeed they do live on odours, and not only through them are more healthy and more happy and attain a greater age."

✕ The excellent Doctor having now made an end to his discourse, Signor Pietro, turning courteously to him, said: "It appears to me that your excellency all through your speech has doubted whether I should agree to bestow upon our Lady flowers, roses, violets and lilies, and a fair golden apple, and therefore you did seek the support of these gentlemen in the manner we have seen. To let you into the secrets of my heart, Signor Doctor, I feel in the matter even as you have felt—if in some small particular

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we disagree, what marvel is there in that? So many men, so many opinions." "Oh, I see you desire with these sweet words of yours to take away my power to strive against you ; but proceed for I shall not spare you," answered the excellent Doctor. To whom Signor Pietro : "The small point on which I agree with you not, and I will ever maintain it, is that these odours which you do tell us are revivifying and nutritive and altogether good, and worthy of our Lady, are at times the occasion of much harm." "How mean you?" demanded the Doctor. "Because," answered Signor Pietro, "I do find that pleasant gardens are like matches, and set afire our voluptuous and incontinent desires. Not without reason was it that the great orator Cicero, having in mind the adultery of his wicked enemy, sought to

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describe the pleasant places, where it might have been committed, as stimulating and inciting to sin. That which made the palace of Cæsar so delicious and agreeable a resort to the Emperor Tiberius, whither for his diversion he was wont to go, I believe that very few, if any, know. And, to come to the point, how could those walls, however beauteous, have wrought so deep within him, had they not been laved in the fragrance of these flowers, roses, lilies and sweet violets, which you do urge upon our Lady?" "Truly you tempt me with your words," the excellent Doctor interposed and went on: "I answer you, that if our hearts be well disposed, never shall we succumb to the evil influences of such places, but rather the reverse. And hence it is that some whose hearts do know to what sweet uses

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fair gardens should be put, are thereby raised to the contemplation of things celestial, and give themselves to penitence, as Petrarch doth show in the sonnet 'Glorious Colonna,' and in his Dialogue on Gardens. But tell me, do you not desire our Lady, already perfect in beauty to the eye, to have a heart, a pure will and a most divine compassion?" "Why yes," answered Signor Pietro. "Then doubt not," said the Doctor, "that roses and violets will ever arouse in her any but the sweetest thoughts. Doubt not that never foul nor evil wish shall come anigh her." "God grant it may be so, but yet I cannot say I am less confident and resolute in my belief," said Signor Pietro. "I have spoken the truth, of that you may be confident," replied the excellent Doctor. At last Signor Giacomo, seeing on one side these

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two still striving, and on the other, of the two remaining gentlemen, one desiring to talk of artificial enhancements of our Lady's beauty, and the other prematurely demanding judgment on our mistresses, she to be adjudged the fairest the which most nearly did approach the peerless beauty we had created and completed and bestowed upon our Lady, spoke thus: "Meseemeth, fair sirs, that the hour hath arrived to abandon our quarrels, contentions and discourings. To the which, therefore, an you love me, I pray you put an end. To-morrow night, having yet to create our Lady's sweet inner self, we will discourse thereon, and fail not likewise to speak of artificial charms, and lastly, receive the pronouncement of our Judge upon the rival merits of our Ladies." He ceased, and having revived our weary spirits, in the



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manner of the night before, with a little of the rare and delicate wine with which the vaults of Signor Giacomo were filled, we sought our chambers for sleep and sweet repose.

## PART III

DOUBT, in sooth great doubt, has ever exercised the minds of the learned ones of the world, my honoured Lord, as to the true definition of man. Some hold that the soul alone, others that the body alone is the real man, the creature that is above all other created things, greater than all, more worthy and more wonderful. The first, defending their judgment and opinion as good, say : As the word horseman properly speaking does not signify the horse, but only the man, yet the man, if he use not the horse, is not called a horseman, so the soul alone is said to be the man, but not unless it be found within the body." The second, on the contrary, argue

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thus : " As the word glass signifies a vessel only when it doth contain within itself the wine, even so the body is the man only while it holdeth the soul hidden and concealed within it." Whoever considers these two opinions as diverse and antagonistic finds in the end that neither the first nor the second explain the matter. Since, in the first case, if the soul alone is the man, then the body is nothing though the soul be enclosed within it and could do nothing without it. Again the second likewise appear to me to bewilder their brains and contradict themselves, since if the body only is the man but not save the soul be within it, then of necessity the soul must be something and of some account. Plato causes Socrates in the Dialogue entitled " Alcibiades " to declare the first opinion, and it is again repeated by his Messer Julius

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Camillus in the "Idea of the Theatre." "Since," says Camillus, "the head we carry is not we but a thing used by us, so the body, although that again is carried by us, is not we, but a thing used by us," which words give us to understand what Socrates, according to Plato, states a little more clearly, that the soul alone, whether or not it be joined to the body, is the man. Camillus goes on to compare the body to vesture, of the which though a man be deprived and lack, nevertheless he remains the same man that he was with it and in it. Hence it is that the said Plato (who putting these words into the mouth of his master is commonly believed to speak his own opinion) used to say that 'twas not the real man which could be indicated with the finger. Hence it is that Seneca names the body the dwelling-place of the man;

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whence, I believe, arises that jest at the hunchbacked Emperor Galba : “ Galba has no fine house.” Hence it is that Cicero in the dream of the younger Scipio (which Petrarch doth touch on in his Africa, and again in one of his Dialogues) likens the body to a tower or fortress of which man is the guardian. The witty Landino in the twenty-fourth of Horace’s Odes uses the same simile. Hence it is that in Petrarch and Bembo the body is compared to a house, a gown, a prison, a cast-off garment and a veil. And lastly, hence it is that the holy and afflicted Job did say to his Creator : “ Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews.” The second opinion me-seemeth has been favoured by those who have said that the body only is ours, with us is born and grows : while the soul, having passed

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through a number of other bodies, is not our sole property. But 'tis easy to see that the true definition of man has not yet been discovered and still remains to be found. I say therefore that neither the soul alone, nor the body alone, but both together go to the definition of a man, and we do firmly believe that the reasonable soul and the flesh together do make a man ; that otherwise he is not, or if he be, he is only half and no true man at all. But true it is that the better and greater part of a man is the soul, since it endures for ever and is immortal, whereas the other part is but mortal and weak. This being above dispute I do greatly marvel when I bethink me, that to please the body we one and all do work as hard as in us lies ; whereas upon the soul we hardly cast a glance, or in other words, for the soul but very few

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have ever care or thought. But who knows not those persons, the which with utmost care do clothe their outer man in rich and glowing purple, soft light silks and even much-prized gold, bedecking it moreover with the rarest gems, the while their inner man they leave most naked, reft of all the true and noble virtues, with scarce the thinnest veil or merest thread of good intention. Such persons might in all good faith be likened to those temples of the old Egyptians the which to outer view most beauteous are, and with most wondrous art designed, while within naught may be seen but some imaged cat or wine, or meanest vegetable that foolishly the folk do worship? Or to some sepulchre the which within all empty is and void, while outwardly it doth display fair images of marble worked in gold, polished

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at great expense and no small chiding at the implements. But not such are the gentlemen, of whom much has been said in the preceding Parts, for that they are the lodging place of every virtue, and filled in fullest measure with fair usages and courtesy, and are in short endowed with all the parts that most become them, and desiring to find the same in their Lady (who otherwise, despite the marvellous fairness of her outward person, they would not judge supremely beautiful) they proceeded according to their custom when the morning was come, and not in vain, to fly their falcons, returning thereafter to the rarest of palaces, wherein at the usual hour they did refresh themselves with a rich and goodly supper, and then drawing near the cheerful glowing fire, when all were seated they made great jest and sport among them-



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selves with mutual gibes, that hurt not in their harmless mirth. Till remembering that 'twas their last night together and that the Lady whom they had created so fair and lovely in all outward seeming lacked yet (to render her complete and perfect in the eyes of all men) all inward graces, they agreed together to amuse themselves for a short while upon the paint used by those ladies, who have been ill advised to daub it on their faces, in vain endeavour to put back the hand of Time, that never will restore the years gone by and fled. The charge of this part of the night's discourse was given by one consent to Signor Ladislao, my faithful Achates, for that he had as yet spoken at less length than any other of the company; therefore we did entreat him, since, being endowed with a fluent tongue and most sweet speech, he could not

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fail to delight all present in the highest possible degree, and moreover 'twas clear he was possessed of so great strength and vigour that he might spend the whole night in discourse without ever growing weary. So he, with no tedious and formal circumlocution of speech, after thanking and praising the company for the honourable task they had laid upon him, began his discourse in all cheerfulness: "Of the loathsome and disgusting composition of the paint with which many ladies, both in this country and abroad, do beautify or rather disfigure themselves, I, gentlemen, do not desire to run the risk of speaking, for it being the ugliest and nastiest thing, as every one of us is clearly aware, there might easily bechance me such fatigue and nausea, that even as befalls in the overloaded stomach, my spirits I should scarce retain in

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my breast ; and, moreover, I should lose you good listeners, who stay with me while my discourse pleases you, but if it afforded you displeasure, away you would fly and leave me alone, which would surely come to pass if I talked of that I mislike and that stimulates me not to fair speech. I will speak, however, more than willingly of the disagreeableness, the shame, and of the twofold hurt to those ladies who, in such way and through such means, do endeavour to make themselves fair and blooming in the eyes of beholders, resembling those masks that are called Modanese, or those apples (oh ! vengeance of God, who can ever forget it) that were one of the products of Gomorrah ; the disagreeableness therefore is very great, and I will say this for myself, that never have I beheld such ladies (and the occasions have been but

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few) without betaking myself out of their sight with all possible speed, and with the more reason because, save for the paint, they would have appeared, in the roads and the streets, far more hideous to behold than ever was Boccaccio's Saracen of the Piazza or Baronci's desired one. If they have not a care they may come to like straits with those who, wishing to avoid Charybdis, fall in with Scylla, or, as the homely proverb hath it, fall out of the frying-pan into the fire, even as that lady with the close-shaven head, who, having been called out of the house by a neighbour, and discoursing with great affability, suddenly became aware that she had not even a cap on her head to conceal it. Whereat she was as covered with confusion as if she had unwittingly revealed those parts that cannot even be named without shame."

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“Oh, oh!” cried all the company together, but Signor Ladislao, without a smile on his face, proceeded : “It doth happen at times (I tell you not as some do that no woman hath wisdom) to many ladies that, through lack of good judgment, they choose the greater evil and cause the company to smile at their devices, the which are neither to be commended nor good. But what shall we say of those who, being naturally beautiful and desirable, love to increase their charms? Who seek with artifices to supplement and enhance their real loveliness? Have such gone astray? Have their brains a kink in them? They do not know what they are doing? They are not in possession of their senses? Oh, good God, grant me patience! It is often said that natural beauty is rendered hideous by the use of paint; but know you not what they

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say who do use it? They say their natural beauty is increased if they adorn themselves, if they take pains to make them beautiful. Oh, wise Sybils are these! It is not always true, but rather false, this that they say, for if to those who are fair, something be added to make them yet more fair, it doth often bechance that whereas they were in the first place most charming and delightful to behold, they have become infinitely less pleasing. Is it not true, that if a handsome house, all made of marble, be built in some part of this our city of Udine, it may be beautiful and delightful to behold? But if the lord thereof seek to paint and embellish it will it not become a fantastic folly? So that what had been pronounced by all pleasing and complete in its beauty, would now be considered lacking in both respects. Again, what read we of

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Alcibiades? Used he not to say that the flowery and artificial orations of Pericles, on whose lips 'twas said the Goddess of Eloquence was seated, which turned, twisted, and made possible the thing that was not, made not one half the impression of the simple and unadorned speeches of Socrates. I would these ladies comprehended that as in Nature's vast untended solitudes great trees do grow in more luxuriance and greater numbers far, than all the cultivated plants by deft hands cherished in ornamental gardens for the spectators' pleasure, and far more exquisitely the wild birds sing on the green branches in lonely woods where none do hear them, than shut in gilded, painted cages in crowded cities for those instructed, so they themselves do please far more, and are in truth more beautiful when, contenting

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themselves with their own natural beauty, they touch not paint nor aught that makes the face more fair, if such things be, for in truth to my mind they never aid in pleasing. I would these dames did know that as the unchecked ivy is much more beauteous, and more beauteous the varied flowers of earth before a hand hath touched or pressed them, so they are far more fair when no spot nor daub of paint mars the real freshness of their faces' skin. Lastly, I would that they did hold it certain that as to human minds more lovely is the spring that gushes freely from the living rock amid the fresh green grass than any artificial fountain, framed of whitest marble and resplendent with much gold, and much more bright and shining the natural pebbles that bestrew its course, so they add not one whit to their



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appearance, when, despising ugliness, they strive to make them beautiful; rather should they try to follow those who are more worthy, and, following, render themselves more elegant, more polished, and more dignified. Displeasing certainly, to every honest eye, is paint in any lady, and more especially in beautiful and graceful virgins, whose property is the simplicity and dove-like purity that much delight and please. And oh, when that it happens, as always does bechance, the loved and much-used paint, in which they put their faith to please, doth turn their skin smoke-coloured, can then white lead restore the hue of health, even though the painter's hand touches the white with colour according to his pleasure? When, later still, with paste they smear their faces, does it appear the living flesh being a thing insensible, and

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when too soft doth swell, and seem as if 'twere raised? Not thus, by means of such foul trash, made of the stones left over from the building of a wall, much use of which doth kill the soul within, did that one, kindler of so much love, long years remain most fair, Helen, I mean. Not thus Hippodamia the fair, nor Penelope. Not thus did Polyxena please the proud, passionate and strong Achilles; nor Iole and Omphale, the strong and powerful Hercules; nor Deianira; nor Hippolyte and Phædra, the cruel and perfidious Theseus; nor the unfortunate Phyllis, Demophon; nor Medea, Jason; nor the faithful Cœnone, Paris; nor Hermione, Orestes; nor the unhappy Laodamia, Protesilaus; nor the forsaken Ariadne, Bacchus; Daphne, the fair Apollo; Proserpine, Pluto; Venus, Mars, Anchises, Mercury

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and her beloved Adonis ; Danae,  
Europa, Leda, and many thousand  
others, Jove. And to pass into the  
land of history, not thus did the  
most chaste (be silent here the  
vulgar ignorant) and most beauteous  
Dido please the ardent Hiarbas ; not  
thus the most modest Virginia that  
tyrant who so ill did use her. Not  
thus Ersilia, Romulus ; Sophonisba,  
the good King Masinassa ; Strat-  
onice, Antiochus. Not thus the  
beauteous Rachel, the patient  
Jacob ; Bathsheba, King David ;  
Tamar, Ammon ; and the wise,  
chaste, strong, and beautiful Judith,  
the wretched Holofernes. Not thus  
the Sabines pleased the Romans ;  
Livia, Augustus ; and, lastly, the  
famous Lucretia, Sextus Tarquinius,  
to which fair lady, and to many of  
those named above, if real and not  
counterfeit beauty did bring harm,  
'twas for no other reason save that,

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as Petrarch says, beauty at times is hurtful. They would have shown but little knowledge and comprehension of beauty, if to seem lovely and desirable they had betaken them to paint and white lead, or in other words, dishonour, for, aside from hurts they did receive, is not such thing dishonour, and great dishonour? Yes, in good sooth, since 'tis the wont of the bold courtesans thus to anoint and put colour on their faces, adorning themselves after the manner Boccaccio strongly condemned and found fault with in the widow mentioned before in this our discourse. For damsels of good name and fame, it suffices that at all points they should be clean, for certain 'tis that cleanliness as much becomes them as does toil ourselves. Oh, how well Poliziano expressed it in a letter written to Signora Cassandra of Casa Fedele, when

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he said that she did ornament paper with ink and not her face with paint, which all do know brings much shame and reproach ; and for sign and token of the same, listen while I relate to you what chanced to others years ago in this our land. A most noble and gallant gentleman of Lombardy being about to wed a most fair maid of rank equal with his own, and wishing to celebrate and honour the nuptials magnificently, in a fashion befitting their high degree, did order thousands of pheasants, quails, fat capons, thrushes, turtle-doves, pigeons, and sweetmeats. Nor lacked there the preparation of a thousand fruits, nor all those dishes proper to such feasts. Wines of all colours, white, amber, purple, and black, from Greece, from Corsica, from Sanseverino, Salerno, Fascignano, Roccese, Amabile, Brianfesco,

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Trebbiano, Vernaccia from Comiglia and divers other places were there in profusion, but fearing to appear a Bacchus I will say no more on that matter; neither will I dwell upon the magnificent and varied hangings, the richly embroidered garments, and all those things that most beseem so honourable a bridal pair. Now at the rich and sumptuous feast that honoured the occasion there met together many lords and gentlemen and dames of high degree, both beautiful and rich, among whom, so Fate ordained, were many who, 'twas plain to see, did paint and ornament themselves. Hence it fell out that a desire arose in some who were content with their own natural charms to make all those adorned with artificial pink and white a laughing stock to all the company, to the end that

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never more would they desire or wish thus to court admiration. The plot laid, it was proposed by one who knew of it, that she should start a game, wherein the others were to imitate her actions and do as she did. All did to this agree, even the artificial ones, who little recked that 'twas a conspiracy got up to shame them. She, therefore, who was leader, rose and right merrily after her the others. Going next into their midst, she did many things in sportive mood, followed and imitated by all those present, each of whom, as the game did rule, had always to do that which she did first ; at last, turning to one of the damsels, she ordered her to fetch a basin full of water, and when 'twas come she took it, and placing it on a stool, plunged both her hands therein and bathed her face, the which more fair became than

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it had been before ; this, too, did her companions. The others, seeing themselves like mice in a cat's power, strove to draw back, refusing so to do ; but all trembling the company compelled them, and to their no small shame they stood revealed, with faces wrinkled, lined with crow's feet, marred, sallow, or with the hue of smoke, or ill-stained yellow wood and all so changed from what they had appeared that those who saw them could scarce believe their eyes. Oh, how much better 'twould have been had they remained content with what Nature had bestowed upon them and not with white lead, paint, unguents, pomades, tricked and bedecked themselves after the fashion that Ariosto in the *Cassaria* and in a *Satire* did make believe to lay down as a law. Not so ashamed would they have been, no, as virtue



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alone doth glorify a man or woman so vice alone doth cover them with shame and infamy, and o'erspreads their fame with blackness deeper than that of pitch or crow. But since in these days truth doth raise up in some men and in some ladies rather hate than love, and disdain than kindness, better 'tis that I put aside much that I might say and that remains unsaid touching the shame that painted ladies must endure continually, and pass on with a brief word to the grave hurt sustained by those who thus do beautify themselves, and not alone on life and body." "No, no," said all the company at this, "speak further of the shame of these embellished ones, after touch upon the twofold harm, and at the end say all that doth remain for you to speak, fearing not to follow the most ancient example of Orpheus."

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“But which of you will warrant me,” said Signor Ladislao, “that no such ill chance shall befall me as did him? I tell you,” added he, “that neither poetry, nor guitar, nor bow of violin, nor Calliope, nor any power that ever was in Orpheus, could pacify the fury of scorned dames seeking to wreak their rage, naught such availed Tamyras against the fury of the Muses that did blind him. And if Stesichorus in his prudence had not set himself to bepraise Helen as formerly he had contemned her, as has already been related, I dare aver he would have needed, if his life were lengthened, either the staff of Tiresias or the boy of Æsculapius. And in conclusion let me tell you that ladies, so to speak, do not stand idle when cursed and despised; but still I have to speak about the two-fold harm, so prythee pardon me

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if I no longer dwell upon their rages. The harm, therefore, that paint doth bring upon these ladies is most grave, and did they but view things aright they would, in imitation of the wise and prudent Prometheus and not of foolish, heedless Epimetheus, fly from it, as doth a heron from a falcon or a young shepherd from a cruel poisonous snake ; since soon their visage doth fall into hollows, like those upon a carven pillar, with the deep lines that we see on faces of the aged, which all wrinkled are and furrowed ; the mouth begins to purse itself and out of it to issue forth hot foetid breath like that of crafty and malicious wolf or fierce and dreadful lion. And these that mayhaps once were teeth like pearls are now quite black, but yet they might suffice, did not their looseness end in one being dropped and then

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another, till but few do in the mouth remain, and those few so uneven as to call to mind the pipes of Pan, or perhaps the shapes of fingers, one of which is long and all the others in succession shorter. But more of this those yet unsatisfied can read in Ariosto's first of all his satires, while I do hasten on to that far greater harm wrought by such dames upon the immortal soul to which is lost all chance of heavenly triumph and eternal bliss. For daubing o'er with paint the face that God has given them most clearly shows, as Signor Pietro told us yesterday, that they are not contented with it, through the which thing do they offend Him, who less than all besides they should offend, the Artificer infinitely good and just and infinitely pitiful, Lord God Almighty. And since I will not pass this over without proving

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it, hark to the most true words Saint Ciprian did cry: 'God's work and His creations must not be meddled with in any manner, neither with powder in colour yellow nor black nor red, nor yet with any inventions whatsoever may man spoil and mar his natural lineaments, the which if any man or woman do, desiring to transfigure or improve with their own effort and industry what has been so exactly framed, it is as if they put their hands behind their backs and said: "Stay awhile, Thou hast not made me as I do desire."'

A thing too dreadful to conceive of, and that should make to stand on end the hair of those who have the least faint spark of reverence and love of God. To make you somewhat comprehend the magnitude of this offence that they do offer the Most High,

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imagine to yourselves a Prince, raised far above all other princes, whose stores of gold were so immense that they did far transcend the wealth of Crassus, Cræsus, Midas, Lucullus, the Indies, yea, of all the mines and caves in the world, in whom there rose a wish to give a hundred thousand crowns to a thousand poor unhappy beggars, grovelling in the mud, and a short while thereafter to make them co-heirs with His only son to all His vast possessions. So causing them to come before Him, He did allot to some their crowns in gold, and some in silver, whereupon the latter seizing that great Prince by the shoulder desired that He should forthwith mete them out their crowns likewise in gold ; how would their act appear to you, fair sirs? Would it not seem most black ingratitude? Are not such

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utter ingrates unworthy to remain upon the earth? Yes, certainly. In like manner those ladies, who, not content with their own natural faces, do make use of paint, ungrateful and unthankful are to the great God who made them. For the Prince with the vast stores of gold is God, in whom all treasures may be found. The gift of many thousand crowns is life, that all do have from Him in His sweet charity. The thousand mendicants that were an hungered, are women born and conceived in sin, even as we, and even as we, sprung from the dust. These too are the co-heirs, the which by God have been created to the end that with Christ Jesus, the only son of God, they might eternally enjoy delicious Paradise. The beggars who were granted crowns of gold are those dames to whom in this life celestial loveliness

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is given. But they whose crowns were silver are those whose lack of beauty doth compare with the more fortunate as silver does with gold. Those insolent ones who dared seize with their hands their benefactor's shoulder, desiring that they should be given crowns of gold instead of silver, are they who, discontented with the gifts bestowed upon them by the wise and gracious Ruler of the universe, do strive for beauty by means of paint. Great therefore is the wrong the souls of such dames suffer, and until that they are reconciled with their Creator, abandoning all use of red and white and fragrant essences, and all that doth offend Him, what hope have we for them? But yet I hope that seeing untouched of such things that pure dove, our Lady, as yet but half created (for we in our entirety do consist of a



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soul and the veil thereof, the body), they may repent them, and repenting, as one who, having missed the road and turned back, returns again to higher things and not possessing great external beauty, endeavour so to cultivate the inner that it may grow and reach at length the ultimate perfection. And why should I not thus hope? Not only are all women as prone to good as evil, but always in them burns a fierce desire to save themselves alive, and if they sin, 'tis chiefly through simplicity and ignorance, nor are they, well I know I do not err in this, tardy and slow to travel in the path of honour and of health when to them 'tis made clear that they have wandered from it. Full therefore of this hope I'll now begin at your desire to discourse upon our Lady's inner self and of the virtues that she needs to raise her beauty to



*Raffaello Sanzio*



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the highest perfection, and render her irresistible even to the hardest and most insensible not only among men but among women." Here, as doth pause a Barbary steed in rapid course till something fallen in its path hath been removed, Signor Ladislao, though naught had interrupted his harangue, stayed for a moment and did then proceed: "First of all therefore, before aught else in the world, she should protect and hold most dear her honour and her chastity, the supreme and most particular prize of every woman, of the which if evil fate deprive her, no longer can happiness, nor even life itself be hers, as Laura perceives in the sonnet 'Life is dear' and Macario's muse, according to Sperone in the tragedy entitled 'Canace,' for without chastity what beauty and what goodness can remain, as the unhappy Lucretia did answer to her husband according to

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Livy, and as Angelica demands in her Lament, according to Ariosto? Modesty once lost, each other virtue is as naught in any lady, who while she doth bear untouched the fair flower of her virginity is like, as Catullus doth finely say, and Ariosto in his 'Ape,' the rose, that in a pleasant garden, enclosed and fenced on every side, reposes on its native thorn bush, far from sheepfold and shepherd, caressed by soft sweet breezes, the dewy dawn, the water, and the rich earth in all its fulness, and is desired of many a beauteous youth and maiden, gallant and mistress, who would with it bedeck their temples or their breast. But if the white flower of her chastity be suddenly reft from her, a lady loses with it all the love and all the favour which the world has ever yet bestowed upon her, like the rose which being taken from its parent stem and

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from the green bush whereon it had grown fair, loses its goodness, grace and beauty and the favour of both man and Heaven. The possession of chastity therefore being the honour, and its lack the infamy of all the female sex, what marvel that of those who were true women there have been many who for it, of their own free will, did offer up their lives. I will not quote what has been written on this matter by the author of the 'Cortegiano,' nor what you all can read concerning the chaste Isabella in Furioso's book, nor what is to be found at the end of the First Book of Livy, at the end of the Second Book of Ovid's 'Fasti,' in the Fourth Book of Dionysius, in the eighth part of the Commentary of Servius upon Virgil, in Petrarch's sonnets, 'In such a star,' and 'Life is dear,' and in a thousand other places concern-

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ing the aforesaid most unhappy Lucretia. I will not quote what the Germans, with Valerius Maximus at their head, have said regarding modesty, nor yet what Petrarch wrote concerning chastity. Neither will I tell of Ippo, that Grecian lady mentioned by Valerius and Petrarch in the afore-quoted places, nor yet of the thousands upon thousands of others who chose death rather than lose their honour, and if 'twas wrested from them (although if wrested 'tis scarce true to speak of it as lost, since 'tis the will that sins and not the body) sought death from their own hand, even as Lucretia did ; or flung themselves into some river in extremest misery, even as she whose bright example lives for ever in the pages just now mentioned of the learned author of the ' Cortegiano.' But if I discourse not upon all those heroines of old, shall I not tell you

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somewhat regarding those who had lived in times nearer our own? Certainly, so listen. In the days when the city of Aquilea was taken by Attila, after three long years of the most brave resistance, a lady dwelt therein named Dugna, richly endowed with beauty and with wealth, who, when she saw the enemy did cruelly and with great licence celebrate their victory, feared that her honour would be taken from her and therefore went upon a turret of her house, that looked upon the Natissa, the river that flowed by, and wrapping her cloak around her did throw herself precipitately down into it. In this same city, betrayed, ruined, slaughtered and destroyed, there dwelt another fair and modest lady, by name Onoria, who as she was being borne off by the fierce and savage soldiers did chance upon the tomb wherein was laid her husband. Breaking



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away from her hard-hearted captors she threw herself upon the beloved form, and with laments embraced it, calling again and yet again upon the dead ; none could separate her till the most impious and cruel of her ravishers seized her and, plunging his sword through her body, caused her most miserably to die. Of yet another example I will speak : the perfidious Rosamunda, for that she had betrayed the city of Cividale into the hands of Catanno, King of Hungary, of whom she was enamoured, having been impaled upon a stake, and held up to the scorn and jests of all the populace, her two daughters, by name Appa and Giala were left alone upon the world. These being now grown virgins, and as with rarest beauty so with blushing modesty endowed, did presently draw all eyes to them ; but fearing for their honour, they

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placed between their breasts (O courage beyond praise or price!) two dead chickens, the which becoming putrified, did with their foul and stinking odour drive away all those who dared approach the maidens. Thus did they furnish forth in truth an ever-memorable example of those who did preserve in its integrity their maiden modesty, and more to us than others. Now in the saving of their honour some have not had a care for this life or the next, and which of us has not wept with Philomela, when, as Ovid tells in the Sixth Book of his *Metamorphoses*, her cruel brother-in-law did ravish her by force? Which of us has not compassionated the most unhappy Dido when, as Virgil narrates in his Fourth Book, her prayers and tears availed not to keep her Æneas, through whom she had lost her

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chastity and that fair name with which alone she might at death take flight up to the stars? But these are fables. Which of us has not read with streaming eyes the amorous tale of Plutarch, wherein he tells how two fair sisters both were ravished by the aid of force, and being plunged thereat in utter grief and melancholy (for losing honour they judged all was lost), their ravishers did cast them in a well there to die miserably ! Which of us reading in Lando of his familiar friend, who with a servant's aid, being otherwise unable to effect it, came to enjoy the most rare beauty of a Paduan maiden, the which had always held him off, unmoved by all his earnest pleading and large offerings, came to enjoy, I say, in her despite, does not with heart and soul condemn the ravisher, and of the damsel think with tender-

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est pity and compassion? To whom does Marcia, Varro's daughter, not seem worthy of the highest praise, in that, though highly skilled in sculpture and in painting, naught could induce her to depict a man, for that she would not view his privy parts? Who does not praise Zenobia, of whom before we've spoken, for that she would not even lie with her own husband, save for the purpose of begetting children? Who does not praise Baldacca, lowly foreign maiden, the which to Emperor's Otto's oft persuasions (though poor she was, almost to indigence), mountains nor hills, as 'tis said, could not prevail upon her to consent. But of chastity, of the which our Lady must ever have an earnest care, enough has now been said, and no more need is there of discourse on the matter, or for wearying both yourselves and me

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with superabundant words. So let us bestow upon her yet another virtue and most sweet grace of character, gentle modesty, the which, so learned men do tell us, doth borrow from virtue its colour, and its tint from praise. So did Diogenes affirm when he beheld that damsel whose blushes and sweet bashfulness flooded her face with colour like the rose. What dame of good renown will you find spoken of among the writers, to whom they have not granted as a signal mark of goodness, modesty. Virgil doth make Lavinia overcome with shame in the Twelfth Book of his *Æneid*; Acontius Cidippe, as Ovid doth relate; Ovid again, in the Third Book of his *Metamorphoses*, Diana; in the Fourth, Andromeda; in the Sixth, Philomela; in the Seventh, Procris; but let me leave these now. Ariosto

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speaks of Angelica's maiden shame when she is fastened to the barren rock, and when the hermit with courage places his hand upon her breast, and Bradamante's and Marfisa's when they behold Ullania lying on the earth in much disarray. Bembo in the Asolani doth celebrate the modesty of Lisa, Sabinetta, Madame Berenice and that fair damsel who, to the soft sound of the viola, sang that sweet song 'Thy virtue love.' Sannazzaro, describing Amaranta, in Arcadia, doth call the blush that mantled in her cheek, a matron's, but Tibullus speaks of it as yet virginal. And true it is that though a blush may not be found upon a virgin's cheek, it should be there, as is but meet and right. Thus in the First Book of his 'Golden Ass' Apuleius calls a blush virginal. I will not try to prove to you that modesty likewise

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becomes a youth, and must not be called rustic, for if I did, methinks I should be like unto those men who, striving to bring proof of that for which in truth no proof is needed, do wrap their theme in much obscurity, as when they talk, in short, of how the sun turns round, the wind doth wander, the flame up-rises and the brook flows downward, for who is he who doth not know these things? And who likewise is not aware that youths have need of modesty? Therefore I will not try to prove it, and the less feel urged thereto in that this bashfulness and blushing is at times to be perceived, as Aristotle doth complain in his fourth Ethic, in those well on in years, for certain 'tis, as he did know full well, that in such persons 'tis not a thing to praise but rather to mislike and blame. Therefore, returning to our Lady,

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she shall be as the aforesaid Ariosto doth desire in his first Satire, modest, lowly, reverent, for reverence, whilst that it doth become each rare, ingenious, and enlightened spirit, is most meet in a Lady, who garbed therein doth show herself, as did Alcina's maidens, more fair, more blooming and more exquisite. Moreover it doth please me that with her should be seen the spindle, needle, reel and distaff, and if these, though I trow otherwise, should to your worships seem unmeet for such a lady, her fair and sovereign hands being deemed too wondrous for such tasks, I trust your false opinion and belief will soon be as naught, and in place of it my true one shine forth, when for a brief space you have deigned to lend me your attention for which my best thanks I will tender you." When he had said this he began to



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laugh. " These things that I make shift to give our Lady, as meet and befitting her, are things appertaining to humanity or rather to woman. For man tells me they appertain not to him, truth and experience contradicting it. Therefore it doth follow that they appertain unto woman: but you will tell me: Certainly we confirm this, falling out from you only in that we consider the needle, the spindle and whatever else you spoke of, are not for a Lady and her peers, but for the mean, low, working and plebeian woman; and I reply: You say they appertain unto women, and to women, the noble and gentle, I have allotted them; it follows therefore that to the noble and gentle they belong, for if they do not, neither do they appertain to the other. However, to bring us into agreement and do away with our

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contentions let us look to the writers of old and see what they wrote on the matter. I find that Cæsar Augustus cared not to don any garments that had not been wrought throughout by the hands of his wife, sister, daughter or nieces. Now tell me, I pray you : If so great a prince as Augustus had his vesture worked by such ladies as these, doth it not follow, of necessity that at least they delighted, as in the discharge of their rightful duty, in sewing? And which of our ladies, be she or not the highest, would disdain to sew with the wife, sister, daughter, and nieces of an emperor? Virgil, in the Seventh Book, speaking of the virile and warlike Camilla, says that she knew not to use the distaff and gauntlet of Minerva, wherein were contained the feminine implements. This is not a word in your favour but rather

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in mine ; for the poet desired to show that Camilla, having set her mind solely upon arms and sanguinary, ignominious battles, had forfeited those things that befitted her rank and sex. Furioso speaks in similar fashion of Bradamante, the which was surprised by Fior-despina with a sword at her side, not a distaff. And which of you has not heard tell or read what Alexander the Great did to the mother of the conquered and vanquished Darius, King of Persia? Did he not offer her, after the Macedonian custom, immediately that his eyes fell on her, the distaff? Did not Dido the fair, as we read in Virgil's Fourth Book, bestow upon Æneas the Trojan a garment of rich purple embroidered in gold, the which with her own hands she had made for him? Omphale, Queen of Lydia, when Hercules was her

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lover, did she not cause him to sit near her, and help with her distaff and wool? But what? Let us recall something of her, that has so often honoured these our discourses. I speak of Lucretia, the lovely Roman, of whom we read that, a strife having sprung up 'twixt Collatinus, her most dear husband, Sextus Tarquinius, and others of the house of King Tarquinius Superbus, the while they were besieging Ardea, as to the which of them possessed the most industrious, chaste and good of wives, they having got themselves to horse, and made for Rome, and after to Collatia for to view all their women, she was by them discovered, not as the princesses had been, in songs and dancing, feasts and merriment, but seated (O heart worth many kingdoms and eternal praise!) amongst her maidens cheer-

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fully at work, with distaff and with wool. Catullus in the 'Argonautica' relates how 'twas the practice of Tetide, nurse of the mother of brave Achilles, to bring her every morning the thread that she had spun the night before, to the end she might go forward and not fall behind. And shall we leave Minerva having only said that she is goddess of the force of arms and of fame equal to the other gods? Embroidery howe'er intricate could it conquer her, or any work, the finest of the fine? But all her doings are so wrapped in fable, that scarcely can I judge what is the truth, and therefore leave Minerva to whom (supposing much that hath of her been told lacks verity) we yet may give the needle and the thread, for she in sooth deserves them, and then pass on to our conclusion, saying that there is

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naught of degradation but rather most high honour and all praise in a good use of needle, spindle, distaff, reel, for this our Lady, at any time or place." With these words and others like them Signor Ladislao contrived to change the judgment of the company, so that but one remained who did not yield him full assent ; this being so, he stoutly did proceed with his discourse in cheerful guise : " When that I read in Virgil of Circe's web, and of Penelope again and yet again, in authors such as Homer, Ovid, Juvenal, Propertius and Bembo, I can but come to the opinion, that in our Lady the art of weaving should be a source of praise ; and as the foolish, almost beggar woman who, Virgil tells us, rose at night to spin and the old woman that we meet in Petrarch's pages, have neither of them worked

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upon you so, this being but their duty that they did, that you will yet consent to this our Lady being an adept in the art of weaving, I do entreat you that although mayhap this art is now more often practised by the needy, you should not therefore continue to deny it her. If the example of the two aforesaid generous dames does then not move you, nor keep you from the sin of a wrong judgment which doth still assail you, think on Pallas, and the third one of her arts. For true it is that in the number of these most famous and most noble arts, many wise men have judged it only right to place the art of weaving equally with that of needle and of spindle, of which but now we spoke, and that of reel and distaff. These arts bring profit to the poor and honour (what else indeed should any gentlewoman prize or care to

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think upon) to fair and rich, and those of noble birth. O how sweet 'tis to hear it said of some such generous being: 'She does and knows and does delight to know each thing that adds to the perfection of the female sex, nor does she like that anyone should feel it might be hurtful to their worth or honour.' And afterwards: 'Blessed be she, blessed indeed, who such a thing has raised up, helped and greatly doth desire.' Let us now discourse a while on music, singing, dancing, and if it be that such arts would increase our Lady's charm and beauty, let's grant them to her, for that 'tis our intent to use our best endeavours to perfect her, and the more diligence we bring thereto, the greater our success, if I do not deceive me. I therefore firmly do maintain that music among the honest arts must be



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included; and hence it is that Socrates, though old in years, yet wished to learn it, and furthermore desired that all young people of good birth and breeding should therein be instructed, not as a stimulus to wantonness, which only could bechance the dissolute, but as a bridle, to keep in check the motions of the heart, and hold them under will and reason. For as not every voice but that alone the sweetness of whose tone the melody of sounds increases, so not each impulse of the heart but those alone that do accord with reason have part in the true harmony of life. Moreover Pericles desired that Alcibiades, his nephew, should give himself to study that most honest art so truly Grecian and held in such esteem that, besides being numbered with the liberal arts, whatever man was found to be

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unskilled therein, he was put down as ignorant and uninstructed ; the which, so Marcus Tullius wrote, happened to Themistocles, that far-famed man of Athens, who, at a feast, declined to take the lyre ; an infamy the which Epaminondas the Theban did avoid, singing, or rather sounding it most rarely. Music can quell the fury of wild beasts, tranquillise passions however great they be, and raise us from these dark shadows to the clearest heights, illumined with the unnumbered brilliant gleaming lights that there do reign, and like a falconer with his lure do call us, crying to us unceasingly, for there, when we are gathered to the sleep profound that weighs upon our earthly eyes for evermore, we reach almost to our first origin and race. But to what end shall I lift up my voice in praise of music ? Would it not be,

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thousands having already taken up the charge, like bringing, as says the proverb, 'trees to the wood, water to the sea, flame to flame, verses to Samos, bats to Athens, and crocodiles to Egypt?' Would it not seem a wish to weave again the web that Penelope of old did work upon? And if most heartily my voice I raised in many hundred thousand praises, what service would it be to music? In my opinion, none; for I do verily believe of that great art (of which Simmias, according to Macrobius, to Virgil speaking is not silent) that as slander, no matter by whom spoken, cannot in aught diminish or decrease it, so likewise praise cannot a whit increase the brilliance of the glory of sweet music, the which for ever is maintained in every place, at every season, year after year, almost it might be said by every

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person whether of high or low degree." "You must have patience for a space, Signor Ladislao," said they all, when he had reached this point, and the better to prevent him from discoursing a while in favour and in honour, as he had designed, of music, the which he had so highly though but in brief commended, they began forthwith condemning it as evil and harmful, and productive not of good and chaste behaviour, but rather of perverted and immodest; after quoting, to support their statements, no small number of examples and authorities they caused him to begin anew, as follows:—"You tell me Alcibiades was wont to say that instruments put to the mouth, in order to bring out sound, distorted the musician for he had so to swell his cheeks that his friends could scarce recognise him, and others not at all; and

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moreover, that he, in his efforts once did break the instrument lent him by the master, and so wrought thereby (although he was only a lad) that with the consent of all the people the use of such instruments was straightway put aside in Athens. You tell me that for the same reason Pallas threw into the winding and continually turning Meander her loud-sounding flute, the which picked up by the proud and evil satyr Marsyas (but you said not this) did lead to his provoking the god Apollo, as Sannazaro tells us, to his great cost. You tell me that the aforesaid Apollo strangled a flute-player, that the kings of the Medes and Persians regarded musicians as parasites, that Philip reproached his son Alexander when once he heard him softly with others singing, and that Antigonus, his master, finding him

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to be intent only on singing broke his guitar. You tell me that the Egyptians, condemning music as useless, harmful and lascivious, forbade it their young men, saying it was invented for no other reason than to lead men astray, that the Cicones women persecuted Orpheus, for that with his singing he did charm their men, making them to follow after him, and that the hundred eyes of Argus were, by the means of one small pipe, closed in eternal sleep. You tell me that Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of holy sanctity and profound learning, to whose lecture Saint Jerome continuously refers us, drove music from the Church, saying it did too greatly weaken and enervate our minds, inclining us to lascivious and vain pleasures, and, moreover, it did increase our melancholy, if, per-

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adventure we were assailed by such thing. Aurelius Augustine, father of Holy Church, never approved of it, neither did Aristotle, who said that Jupiter sang not nor played upon the lyre. Lastly, you tell me that someone there was who, singing much more sweetly than his wont, between the sighs of sound, passed from this life, and you deduce from all these examples, authorities and reasons (adding that Antisthenes, the philosopher, having heard say that Ismenides was a most perfect and excellent lute-player gave vent to this opinion: He is a foolish man, rascally and good for naught, for an he were an honest man he would not now be given over to such an art or calling), you deduce, I say, that music is in its nature altogether bad and hurtful, a thing which every man, though not our

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Lady, upon whom I shall make bold to bestow it, ought to fly from, and hate even till death. But tell me, I pray you, do you wish me to refute all that you have but now, as I do verily believe, said mockingly, condemning music, both its effects and power of pleasing, for that I do not see the benefit to be derived therefrom?" "A benefit 'twill be," responded they, "for all that we have said was but to draw you on to speak in praise of music." Whereupon he at once began : "Music is an art of so much excellence, fair sirs, that it has power to tame the wild beasts of the field, the little birds, even the fishes ; the very stones it softens, and hell makes glorious. Orpheus is proof of this, for he could draw around him, by the sweet sound of his lute, the birds, the wolves, the tigers, bears and lions ; and more than



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this, he was in hell itself a conqueror, by reason of the enchantment of his singing and the soft strains of his lute. Of Amphion I will not speak, but even the barbers and the shoemakers could tell of what he did with the rare music of his lyre outside the Theban fortress. Are not the timid deer arrested in their flight by sound of flute, ay, and more than deer?—all animals, as has been said above. But of a fish more marvels I could tell if 'twill not weary you to listen to a tale, the which a many writers have chronicled and sung. 'Tis of Arion, a most excellent performer on the lute, who returning with some others to his country, and seeing that they did conspire to rid themselves of him while that they were at sea, and so possess themselves of the great wealth with which he was returning home, took up his lute,

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and playing a few notes thereon, did throw himself into the sea, and there a dolphin, enchanted by his song, did take him on its back and carry him in safety to the shore, where he did cause an image of the fish swimming to be cast in bronze in memory of this adventure. Waters are conscious of the power of music ; for we may read, that in a certain country was a fountain, the which, when that a lute's sweet sound was heard, could not forbear all suddenly to leap and dance. And to say something higher yet, what marvel is it (since the wild beasts of the woods, the little birds of the air, the fishes in the sea, the stones upon the road, the damned souls in the Abyss, and the waters all are subject to it) if there be nothing which doth more delight our souls? Our souls, I say, the which, having come down into our

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bodies from the celestial harmonies, and after them ever yearning, seek here on earth for the same charm, feeling more joy thereof, if that be possible to those of good intent, than should be felt of any earthly thing. Although not earthly is true harmony, for that it is in substance as the soul, and some there are who say that soul and harmony are the same thing. Therefore it doth arouse in us a pleasure holy and devout, and often pious grief. For the which reason most certainly the good and holy Ambrose did not desire to banish music from the Church and Augustine attached himself no more to Athanasius, of whom you did make mention, than to Ambrose ; for in his Confessions he doth say that both these two opinions pleased him, and he was in great perplexity betwixt them. What marvel is it if the poets,

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present and past, desired to hear sweet music, for that it did most wonderfully exalt their spirits. Homer (whose words are confirmed by Timagenes with the remark that music is most ancient) in the First Book of the Iliad tells how at the banquets of the gods the sweet voices of the Muses blended in rarest harmony with the clear notes of Apollo's phorminx. Virgil likewise in the First Book of his *Æneid* describes at Dido's royal feast the playing of the bearded Hiarbas; and other poets of lesser degree and later days do tell of the sweet music at all feasts and banquets. Apuleius in the Sixth Book of the 'Golden Ass' relates that at the nuptial feast of Cupid and of Psyche, two of the Muses sang, while the god Apollo with his delicate and gifted fingers touched the lyre and beauteous Venus

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danced in swaying measure. While Aristotle, chiefest authority of all, in the Eighth Book of his Politics blames not the practice but rather does maintain that music ought to be performed on all great festivals, and, citing Homer, says it were well the music of the flute should be included in convivial delights, for that it greatly did rejoice the hearts of those at feasts and banquets. What marvel is it that, opinions never varying on this matter, Plato (who in his Second Book of Writings says that the gods, pitying our toilsome lives, did institute recreation, giving us the Muses, Apollo with his lyre, and Bacchus, all of whom do oft inspire us to the song and dance), that Plato, I say, should cavil not at dancing without music, 'tis chiefly in the Timaeus that he misprises it. O music, above all other things

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most sweet and pleasant, I do verily believe that without thee we could not in this world continue to exist, even as without the elements 'twould be impossible ; without thee the blessed souls and heavenly angels could not live in bliss, for that they do perpetually with sweetest voices praise and exalt the primal and eternal Cause, Lord God Almighty ; without thee (if true it is that that sweet harmony the which divine Pythagoras maintains with cleverest argument doth in the heavens reign) the mighty spheres could not perform their endless revolutions. Thou didst encourage and inspire the Spartan armies. Thou wert not despised, but rather praised by Lycurgus, greatest of legislators. Thee Plato (who with Aristotle did ordain that first of all thou shouldst be taught, and deemed thee, sooth to say, a goodly method

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of maintaining the usages of the Republic) believed to be always a thing desired by men both civil and political. Wise doctors, grave philosophers do without doubt adore thy Muse, through which thou cam'st to the world's knowledge. Marica Iperbolo did declare that without thee no art had ever been save letters. O gain inestimable ! Aristophanes bore witness that they of old desired their daughters to be instructed in thee ; wherefore we read in ' Menander ' of that old man, who, demanding that the which had oft to his son afforded much alleviation, said that many a denier on musicians had been spent and on their followers. While Gracchus spoke, his friend behind him did play upon the flute. Pythagoras, seeing certain youths enkindled, and eager to attack a modest habi-

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tation, beckoned to a musician and commanded him to break forth into song, and thus, through thee, quietened they were and pacified. Crisippo did desire that nurses should have a part in thee, for that the little ones do listen to their song, and, crying, are comforted. But like to one of the labours of great Hercules 'twould be to chronicle all that in thy praise has been said: as easy 'twould be to number one by one the stars of heaven or drop by drop to measure out the ocean, as Petrarch says. Therefore will I, returning to our Lady, stoutly affirm that through thee no small honour will she obtain when gently she shall deign to touch the viola or lute (two instruments that greatly please me). Certain 'tis that those fair damsels who, in Bembo's pages, touched one the lute, the viola the other, with



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wondrous skill, and great praise obtained from the Queen of Cyprus, and other most notable ladies and cavaliers assembled in Asolo to do honour to the nuptials, thus so gaily celebrated, acquired much fame thereby. The same Bembo in the Second Book of the Asolani doth commend music in the young, saying in person of Gismondo : ‘ Oh, with what delight and refreshment of spirit do we listen to the sweet songs of our ladies, and in especial when they are accompanied with sound of some harmonious instrument touched by the soft hand of a fair musician.’ Let therefore our Lady play sweet music at all times and places, but always modestly and always reverently, and not only play, but sing and dance also, as much as is becoming and no more, *i.e.* with modest and with seemly mien ; the which will

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render her for ever pleasing in the eyes of men. And if it may not be for me to talk of other things that to our Lady appertain, I will bestir myself to prove, not only by good service it has done, but through the words of the great writers, that it doth much become her to play and sing. This Petrarch shows through Laura in the sonnets: 'Twelve ladies,' 'Whence gathers Love the gold,' 'Graces that liberal Heaven on few bestows,' and 'When Love her beauteous eyes': and likewise to dance. The which is shown in the sonnet: 'A Kingly Nature,' and perhaps in 'Most fortunate of spots on Earth,' to say naught of those nymphs and Graces, whom the poets, such as Horace in the seventh Ode of his Fourth Book of Poems, present to us dancing and singing at the sweet time of the year when the trees begin to bud;

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but now I cannot, save to your much discomfort and my own, further discourse thereon, for an I do, much yet remaining to be said of this our Lady, when shall I make an end? Better therefore 'tis that in the time that yet remains for me to talk with you concerning such things as still our Lady lacks, I treat them in such fashion, that not on one but each of them a brief while will I spend. Hence of obstinacy, the which is ever a defect in a fair dame, just as it is in horses, I will say but a word before that I go on to other things. Obstinacy, a vice abominable, I hope you'll find no hint of in our Lady. Since, as in the finest and most beauteous cloth more shocking 'tis to find a flaw or stain than in one not so fine and not so fair, so a vice in one fair of body, and no less fair of soul, does more deform and render

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hideous man or woman, than if 'twere found in one of ugly frame and no less ugly heart, making its dwelling and abiding place. The same thing may be said of virtue when by chance we do behold it. But turning back to obstinacy I say 'tis more becoming in a Spanish mule than in a beauteous lady, for poor must be her worth and honour does she not show herself yielding and submissive when that occasion does demand. And now I do be-think me of a sportive tale relating to a woman obstinate, nay most obstinate, in sooth obstinacy itself, that may extort from us a smile or two ; so hear me an it please you to listen. There was once a woman, who, being married to whom I know not (for as he was, like herself, of low and mean estate, he left behind him neither name nor fame), said to her husband when opportunity arose,

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that he was a flea-bitten good-for-naught. He, leaping up in anger, desired her straightway to unsay her words, beginning to bestow upon her many blows and kicks ; but 'twas labour lost, even, as says the proverb, like pounding water with a pestle, talking to the deaf, endeavouring to make white an Ethiopian, or to wash an ass's head. At last, seeing that she would not take back her words, but did rather persist in repeating them, he took a rope, and binding her therewith, lowered her like a bundle, despite her struggles, into a well. In vain, however, since she continued to shout forth the obnoxious epithet ; then did he let her down further until that the water did cover her head ; when up he drew her once more to land. Whereupon she, no longer having voice to miscall him, being yet choked by the water,

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began (O extraordinary and incomparable obstinacy!) to imitate the motions of those birds of prey that tormented by parasites do scratch themselves well-nigh to death." The company hereupon fell a-laughing, not so much at the tale itself but at the impudent manner in the which Signor Ladislao narrated it. When their merri-ment had somewhat subsided, he resumed the thread of his discourse : "Not proud, nor yet a slanderer nor a gossip, nor an informer, should our Lady be ; not proud, for nothing is more hateful, more repugnant, or more displeasing to Almighty God than pride ; the most beauteous of His angels, for that sole sin was cast into outer darkness, where, with his malignant and wretched adherents, in shame he ever must remain, without hope of return. Pride is as a spring whence each

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ugly sin leaps forth ; or a tree whose branches, *i.e.* the sins of mankind, grow large and blossom ; for pride was Nebuchadnezzar driven out seven years to feed upon grass and straw, roaming hither and thither like a wild beast or animal without reason. Alas, I know not what this thing may be, on the which we do pride ourselves ; search for it as I may, never yet have I found it ; seeing (O unhappy and foolish humanity !) we are but dust and ashes, oppressed by the burden of a thousand sins, subject to death, the victims of a thousand misfortunes, more wretched, as Homer says, that any other thing upon the earth, blinded by vain hopes, encompassed by perpetual fears, with a past full of oblivion, and a present and future of ignorance, plotted against by enemies, abandoned to death by friends, accompanied by

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continued adversity, and quitted by fugitive prosperity. The which, if Madonna Cianghella (who, Landino says, in the pages of Dante, was so arrogant in her pride, that one day at a sermon, not receiving the honour she deemed her due from certain ladies, did forthwith seize them by the hair and by the ears) had thought on a while, I do verily believe that not with the proudest but the humblēst, she would have been numbered. Not a slanderer must our Lady be (slander, says the proverb, mayhap is the fifth element), for to speak ill of others is a grave vice, and he who defames others will by others be defamed, if no further ill betide him ; and other ills may bechance, even loss of life, as Dafita the grammarian found to his cost, when, having been seized for speaking ill of his king with venomous



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tongue, he was, without compassion or pity, crucified upon Mount Torace. Which gave rise to that proverb for slanderers, 'Keep thyself from Mount Torace.' Open the little book which Plutarch for his son did write, and therein you will read how one Soter and one Theocritus, a philosopher, were overtaken by the evil fate that ever doth await such barking dogs. Surely that proverb is most true which says, that the tongue, though no bone it hath, yet may break the neck. If Cicero and Demosthenes had placed a bridle on their hasty and unfettered speech, they would, 'tis like enough, have lived much longer and less miserably have perished. No member of our body, said Petrarch, that fine flower of intellect, is more prone to evil and more difficult to curb than is the tongue. And Æsop of Phrygia, the

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chief of story-tellers, used to say, that than the tongue nothing is better, no, nor worse. Hence I marvel not that Xenocrates, when challenged by that company of slanderers with whom he had fallen in, to tell how 'twas that he did say no evil thing of anyone, thus made reply : ' I speak not because at times I have repented speaking ill of others, but never yet have I repented being silent.' Which saying is by Probus in the Poems attributed to Cato, and by Ariosto when he speaks of the mysteries and diversions of Alcina, has been turned into verse,

' How rare it is to find a silent tongue,  
Sometimes an evil 'tis, but far more often  
virtue.'

Slander is so hateful to those who fly from it, that naught there is with which I can compare it. And if it were not that I feared to weary you,

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I would go on with example and example, not only ancient but modern, to prove the trouble and the injury that it has caused both centuries long past and in our own day, but I will be silent. A gossip surely she must not be, for what could less beseem our Lady, or indeed anyone? And the more that gossip she doth hold in abhorrence, the more she will be praised and honoured. For that we should be moderate in our speech 'tis easy to be seen, since great and bounteous Nature, which is God, it hath pleased to grant us two ears but only one mouth, as a sign that 'tis more pleasing to Him, and better for ourselves, little to talk and more to listen; but little heed we pay to such tokens from the heavens, and of tattling, gossiping, and chattering we make no end, nor cease, nor slacken, from morning until night.

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Wherefore if it be true what wise doctors do tell us, that that member is by us, out of all nature, lower animals, birds, fishes, all, more used, yields greater pleasure to the palate, and confers more health upon the stomach, in good sooth, the tongue of none should be more pleasant and more dainty, or better than is ours," "or rather than is our Lady's," interposed the excellent Doctor, and stopped, having scarce interrupted Signor Ladislao who, continuing, replied: "I know full well what partisans of man and enemies of women have been pleased to say; but more glad should I have been had they considered the trouble and the odium to which unjustly they thus subjected this sex, this large array of women, who, in spite of them, do ornament the world and render it more beautiful, and

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then perhaps another and very different judgment would be found upon their pages. I do maintain that ladies are not such gossips as books would have us believe, and the writers, had they bethought them even a little, could easily have set down things much more agreeable, wherefore it doth behove us to be careful how we do treat their judgment. But I must return whence from my theme I fell away, for some might say that having thrown it in the teeth of others, that they have acted ill through malice, hatred and envy, as well might they cast up at me, that I have rushed to extremes and through love and kindness, as Plato used to say, misread true justice. But if this be so, little will opposition trouble me, for rather would I err, though I own not I am in error, through love than hate, as in most cases these ill-spoken ones

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have done. But, returning, as I said, to the theme I fell away from ; we are, I do maintain, too talkative, the which I would not have our Lady ; also should she avoid with all her power and might the vice of the informers, for from such the whole world flees, just as the devil flees from crosses, and are more hated than crosses are by him. He who has this vice is deeply stained by sin, and never I do verily believe will win his way to heaven, for entrance there can only be obtained by means of virtues. The Emperor Domitian used to say that he who punished not informers did incite them and render them yet more hardened in their vice. But now we draw nigh to the end. Of religion I care not to talk, for an I had cared I should have discoursed thereon when I first began to speak about our Lady's inner self. And

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if your worships demand it of me in such fashion that I cannot pass over it with dry feet, as they say, then I will answer them as thousands of years ago, to those that asked why in his laws he put no punishment for parricides, Solon replied, *i.e.* I cannot persuade myself that you would have an impious and irreligious Lady, any more than he could believe that they would have among them those who dared in utter wickedness to take away from father or from mother that which they had had from them in all good will, viz. life. Furthermore our Lady should eat and drink in moderation, and therefore on this matter a few words I'll say. 'Tis known that Noah, when first he came forth from the ark (as Holy Scripture tells us), did set himself with diligence to cultivate the earth, and with his own hands planted vines

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which yielded excellent liquor, now called wine, that soon became diffused throughout the world. But no small debate has this raised, for some maintain that better would it have been had wine never been known. After due consideration of both its good effects and bad upon humanity, I boldly do maintain that 'tis better for a reasonable generation to have it, that its use is good, though its abuse be bad, and none can tell what Noah might have done had not the Most High God revealed it unto him, and if our greediness, the which has caused us many an ill, had not urged us to say that wine is bad, and we had been more blessed without it. The fault is ours that so much scandal has been raised therefrom and ever will be raised. Wine (provided 'tis drunk in moderation) doth marvellously increase our strength



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of body, quicken and refresh our minds, and runs not contrary to the divine Plato's principles of philosophy. It doth rejoice our hearts when they are worn and sad with too much travail, too much care. Who drinks not of it is not fitted to beget, lacks courage and vigour of body, cannot digest and early comes by death. Wine helps us to retain our food, aids our digestion, and our stomach, and strengthens much our nerves. But an I did desire to speak of all the good that, taken in moderation, it doth confer on man, 'twould extend far beyond the limits of my speech, and since I study to be brief and not o'ermuch to weary you I'll leave it, and narrate the evils, that not through its defect, but through our own, it frequently doth cause, in order that our Lady, perceiving both the effects of sobriety and its reverse, will use her best

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endeavours to avoid intoxication and indulgence in strong drink. Wine, therefore, in itself a good, when taken in excess doth cloud the mind, inflame the passions, and cause us to reveal the inmost secrets of our hearts. It doth not let us see the rising sun, and early brings on death ; by it is generated pallor, madness, war, the impudence and assurance to commit every sin ; it maketh the cheeks to hang, the eyes weak, the hands to tremble, dreams a nightmare, and sleep disturbed ; it causes wantonness, and uncleanness, oblivion of almost everything and memory's death. Our Lady, therefore, should avoid delighting overmuch in wine for fear she should be led into such errors, as, O shame to man, many do fall day after day. She should drink with that modesty, so beautiful in her, of which we have already

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spoken, and never forget the great though little thought of virtue of temperance, the which she likewise should observe in eating, since too much food doth make us stupid, and prevents our reaching that excellence of body attained by temperance. Now concerning our Lady's speech, of which as yet we have not spoken, though it is most important, I desire that she shall be sincere, and honourable, for insincerity and lack of honour would as ill become her as doth beauteous scabbard a sword of poorest workmanship, or unsound metal. What doth appear to me as with its point for her is a saying of Piovano Arlotto's which I remember having read. Seeing a youth in brave attire, whose language was most foul, he went up to him and said: 'Oh, young man, use words that do accord with your fine clothes, or else change

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your clothes for such as do befit the language you do use'; furthermore her speech should be (as Laura's was in the sonnet 'When Love her beauteous eyes') clear, soft, angelic and divine, and with the power that we read in the sonnet 'Alas, that beauteous face' was Laura's." To these words many another did Signor Ladislao add, striving therewith to show forth the perfections of our Lady's inner self, and so intent was he that no sign of fatigue either in mind or tongue did he betray, even by a pause. At last perceiving that the hour had passed when on the nights preceding the company had ended their discoursings, and retired to their chambers, he bestowed upon our Lady his last gift, viz. that of letters, in the which, with many examples, culled from the present and the past, with many authorities,

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and reasons that reached in number, if I do not err, even to a thousand, he did maintain women are no less skilful than are men, yea even more, if memory deceive me not. Scarce had the Signor Ladislao reached his goal than, without stopping, he began to strive with all his might to make us see that 'twas his mistress, who was the most like to our Lady ; and straightway all did turn their eyes on me, eager to learn, after the long delay, and anxious suspense, which of their Loves I would pronounce, with utter certainty, the fairest and most charming. First I did earnestly entreat them that two words (the which at once most graciously they did concede me) should be accorded me, after that I had passed my judgment, then turning myself to Signor Giacomo I said : " Such a lady as, in this most royal

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palace, of the like of which you alone are worthy, you and the company here present have created, is, when years are added to her childish growth, my most dear sir, your little daughter, sole pride of you and your most honoured spouse, your unique pleasure, only comfort, and particular content; in the which you have great matter for rejoicing, of thanks to Heaven for such a gift, of ever-present honour and delight." Now was I silent a while, and then began upon what I had in mind to say, when suddenly I woke out of that sleep, in the which, to my no small content and pleasure, all the aforesaid things I had both seen and heard. This, my Lord, sore grieved me, for an I had been able, I also, for a while to speak (as it doth seem I had been asked to do), well do I know that though the Signora Ortensia,

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that most perfect work of nature, if she had displayed the whole of her true beauty and true worth, with which in no rare gift of mind or body can any lady of old times or new at all compare (unless it be that lady of times ancient, from whom she takes her name, whose speech with eloquence was much more sweet than honey is, or manna or sugar), might have had my judgment and my sentence in her favour, yet the others would so nearly have approached her in the praises of their beauty that scarce any difference would there have been betwixt them. And, to talk of my most fair and honourable Toronda (of the three remaining ladies, more divine than mortal to all appearing, having I not now to speak), what other in all those parts, wherein our Lady has been found most perfect, can reasonably

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hope, not to surpass, but even equal her? Now there remaineth but for me to say, my honoured Lord, if it doth seem to you, in these my three nights, this my dream, and, what doth please me most, in this my lovely Lady, that I have not in everything observed decorum, that I have erred, most of all in the first part, in using the first letters of the real names of certain gentlewomen, thus indicating them perhaps too plainly, and lastly that I by inadvertence have left out anything, or touched on aught too lightly, do not therefore let your anger rise against me, nor cease to defend my honour against whoever may (the which I cannot but anticipate) gainsay it, maintaining, on my behalf, that what I've chanced to see, that has it pleased me, naught adding, naught omitting and naught altering to unfold,



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and set down in these pages, consecrated and dedicated to you, of this my joyous and delightful dream. Adieu.

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